
Book Reviews

India's Rise as a Space Power

UR Rao

(New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2014)

Rs 590/-



Outer space has always excited the human imagination. And some of the recent successes of the Indian space programme, as evident in the launch of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) and the Mangalyaan, have certainly led to a new wave of interest in the potential and possibilities of this domain. Much has been written since then on the low cost at which India has managed to achieve a mission that was not only a success in its first attempt, given that even some advanced nations cannot boast of such a feat, but also that India managed this through indigenous efforts. At this juncture of the Indian space programme, a recent book by Prof UR Rao, one of the movers and shakers of the Indian space programme, makes for essential reading. As an insider during the foundational years of the programme and as Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) from 1984 to 1985, Rao is best equipped to present the story of the making of India as a space power. And he does so in a coherent and highly readable manner.

As the author explains, the Indian effort in this domain started with a very modest Physical Research Laboratory at Ahmedabad under Dr Vikram Sarabhai in 1947 and work on cosmic ray investigations through the launch of balloons by a few other scientists at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research at Bombay. Perceiving the huge potential in this field, Dr Homi Bhabha invited Sarabhai to become a member of the

Atomic Energy Commission to initiate space work under the umbrella of the Department of Atomic Energy. Consequently, the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching System (TERLS) came into existence to conduct high energy astronomy experiments. Soon thereafter, a sounding rocket programme was initiated at TERLS by putting into place some international cooperation arrangements with National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the USA, Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES) of France and HMS of the USSR. Thumba's strategic location and the collaboration of the then three important space powers in the effort in setting it up, prompted the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) to grant it the status of a UN sponsored facility in 1967. This then became the hub of international collaboration on peaceful uses of outer space with the objective of opening up possibilities of instruction and training to other nations desirous of pursuing space research.

Meanwhile, India was fortunate to be guided by the leadership of visionary scientists who well recognised the potential of several pioneering technologies and strove to create the institutions and organisational architecture necessary to exploit this. In fact, an interesting insight that emerges from the book is that organisational structures were allowed to evolve as the programme grew. So it was that Dr Sarabhai initiated simultaneous research in the fields of aerospace engineering, sounding rockets, space launchers, propellant engineering, structural engineering, aerodynamics, materials, control and guidance technologies, etc. Step by step, the programme achieved a high level of technological sophistication in space launch as well application capabilities, bringing the kind of laurels we have recently achieved.

One abiding theme of the Indian space programme, as repeatedly flagged by the author, was identified very early as the use of space technology to facilitate a total transformation of society through the intensive application of space technology to solve the major problems

of the country on a self-reliant basis. The words of Vikram Sarabhai as spoken in 1968 at the UN conference on the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space encapsulated this objective of India. He articulated Indian interest in space unambiguously by stating, “We do not have the fantasy of competing with the economically advanced nations in the exploration of the moon or the planets or manned space flight. But we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally, and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society, which we find in our country.” Keeping that singular objective in view, India has steadily advanced in providing applications of the space technologies for mitigation of several socio-economic problems of the nation. Prof Rao’s book actually reads like a racy thriller, taking the reader from one milestone of satellite technology to another. It is extremely inspiring to go through India’s journey from the experimental phase of satellite applications to their eventual operation.

One good example of this, as brought out in the book, is the role of satellites enabled communication in distance education. The vast profusion of television channels we have today actually started with a small pilot experiment with *Krishi Darshan* in 1975 with the objective of imparting farming techniques, health care and nutrition information to illiterate villagers. This marked the beginning of satellite-based instructional and educational TV programmes to remote rural areas and thereby unleashed the power of mass communication for a nation of India’s size and literacy levels. Another example is evident in the manner in which India has used remote sensing for forest cover and water resources management, as well as for some urban planning efforts. Given the kind of denials that India was subjected to from the mid-1970s onwards, it is hardly surprising that self-reliance was an important objective of the space programme. In fact, at a very early stage of its programme, India had decided to build its own space launch capability, a technology that many other space-farers

do not have. In the initial years, however, when the space launch vehicles were being researched and developed, India made effective use of its cooperation with the USSR to launch indigenously designed satellites, and insisted on taking full responsibility of the preparation of the satellite at the launch pad and mating it with the rocket. This brought critical experience that came in handy for India to perfect its own launches.

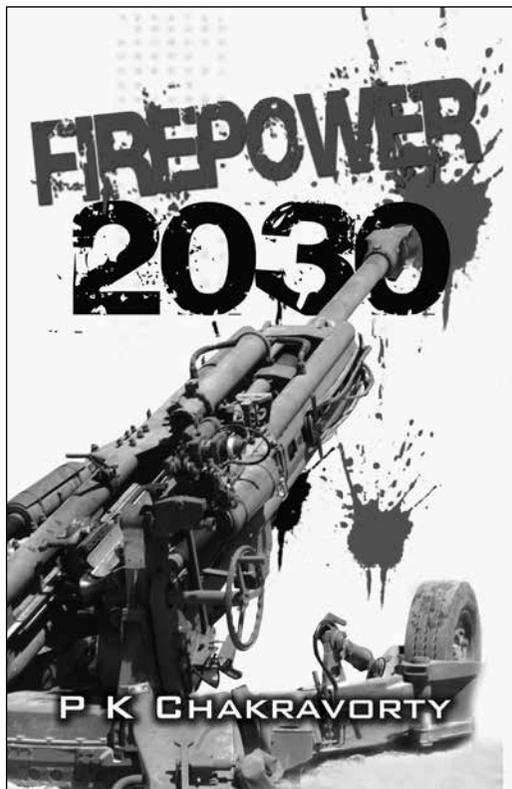
Rao's book contains several inspiring, insightful, sometimes funny, nuggets of information as India graduated from the Aryabhata and other experimental satellites to the launch of applications-based operational spacecraft. During his nearly three decades in the space programme, the country launched 18 indigenous satellites even as it was a victim of Cold War politics. Nevertheless, the country steadfastly continued on its efforts to use outer space for the primary goals of socio-economic benefits. While being a beneficiary of space-based applications for the socio-economic growth and development of the country, India, however, is a fledgling nation in exploiting the benefits of the high ground for its national security needs. In fact, ISRO consciously steered clear of military applications of satellites, and India's space programme is unique in that it has maintained a peaceful orientation. It was only in very recent times that the country launched the earth observation and communications satellites for enhancing the surveillance and maritime domain awareness of the defence forces. It would have been quite useful to the reader if the author had mentioned the thought process on these matters during his years at the helm of the space organisation and the reasons for the military applications of space to be completely ignored even as these were being explicitly exploited by militaries across the world. In any case, this is a lacuna that the country must adequately fill to deter threats to its national security. While the country is steadfastly against the weaponisation of outer space, the use of this medium for military applications falls within the purview of peaceful uses of outer space, as interpreted under the Outer Space Treaty (of which India is a member) and India cannot afford to ignore this. Some

more thoughts from Rao on this aspect would have been welcome. Also, a subject index would have been a value addition to the book.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the book is rich in content and written in an easy style. It should appeal to all those interested in matters of space, as well as laymen too for an inspiring story of India's making of a space power.

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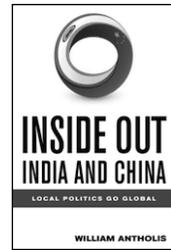


Inside Out: India and China – Local Politics Go Global

William Antholis

(New Delhi: Viva Books in arrangement with
The Brookings Institution, 2015)

Rs 795/-



The book by William Antholis is a detailed narrative about the rise, and rise, of Xi Jinping in China and that of Narendra Modi in India. The ascent, phenomenal and unprecedented, can be attributed to what both Modi and Xi learned first-hand—the lesson of local governance and that local successes and failures will determine the future of the world’s two largest nations. Antholis claims that in the process of writing this account, he traversed 20 Indian states and Chinese provinces in 2012, conducting over 300 interviews in a span of five months. He has narrated many engaging personal accounts of both countries while studying the leadership transition in Beijing and New Delhi.

In addition to delving into the promised lands and heartlands of China, the book provides an interesting take on some of India’s forward, backward and swing states. In 2014, India overwhelmingly elected Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, who had risen to prominence as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, India’s fastest growing state. Likewise, Xi Jinping became President of China in 2013 having served as the top official in Zhejiang and Shanghai, two of China’s most prosperous provinces. This account argues that both countries have elevated strong nationalist leaders with the knowhow to govern not from the top down, but from the inside out—with both Modi and Xi known to have used local political autonomy to unleash local economic dynamism.

While both leaders are currently in the process of renegotiating the compact that connects them to far-flung states and provinces, they have their share of challenges too. Effective local government is required to address vexing problems for both China and India such as air and water pollution, housing shortages, migrant workers and endemic corruption. So do global challenges such as attracting foreign investment, exporting goods and services and fighting climate change.

After Xi Jinping took over, the first year was spent in assertively consolidating control and trying to move China past a decade of rule by an internally divided Politburo. Antholis chronicles how Xi Jinping streamlined the Politburo's decision-making and moved quickly and decisively against several opponents, notably taking down potential rivals on charges of corruption. Xi spoke of reviving the "Chinese dream" and his administration emphasised the primacy of the Communist Party, affirming top-down rule. To prove himself worthy of his father's revolutionary past, Xi Jinping chose the Shaanxi province to begin his political career and spent nearly seven years there as a farmer during the Cultural Revolution. Xi has often described his time in Shaanxi as a "defining experience" and "turning point" in his life. Xi is known to have surrounded himself with a group of powerful leaders better recognised as the "Shaanxi Gang".

Antholis brings out that by the time Xi took over office, in early 2013, the goals for urbanisation had evolved, with plans to move nearly 200 million people from the countryside to the cities by 2022, which is about 1.5 million people per month. Such large scale urbanisation simultaneously has created what the author cites as mountains of local debt, hundreds of millions of unsatisfied workers, dozens of cities with unbreathable air and undrinkable water, and rampant and intolerable local corruption. Perhaps China's greatest challenge is to address these catastrophic side effects of urbanisation while still enabling the economy to grow. Antholis is quite accurate in summing up that none of these problems can be fixed

solely by a strong, centralised government/leadership and that action and accountability must be localised as well.

In case of India's recent political and electoral history, the author suggests that Narendra Modi has done what no Indian leader could do in a quarter of a century. That is, successfully steering a single political party to a commanding parliamentary majority, by winning in nearly every part of the country, right from bustling cities to preindustrial farm villages. The conventional wisdom on Indian politics stated that local and caste allegiances were paramount and that central power was in the decline. However, Modi's victory seems to have turned that wisdom on its head with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that was once regarded as a party of urban middle-class voters from India's north and west, today reaching a point which the author quotes as "... Modi has become the BJP". The author's account makes him assert that the BJP is seen to be forging a new national majority of the economically ambitious, across caste and class, geography and identity. One of Modi's signature successes in Gujarat was to bring abundant and affordable electricity to businesses and households, in big cities such as Ahmedabad as well in small remote villages. Modi is trying to replicate that at the national level by meeting ministers and bureaucrats, insisting that rules be simplified and assuring that he would stand behind them if they took more decisive actions.

The author recalls his personal interview with Narendra Modi in March 2012 wherein the calibrated new nationalism came across evidently. Antholis remembers that Modi's reputation was clearly established in the country as the most successful Chief Minister of an Indian state. Although there were other successful leaders in states such as Andhra Pradesh (now Seemandhra), Tamil Nadu and Bihar, none had been quite as effective as Modi in using his local electoral mandate to seize responsibility from state and national bureaucrats. In the author's discussion with Modi, it was clear that Modi wanted to convert the Gujarat model's success into a national phenomenon.

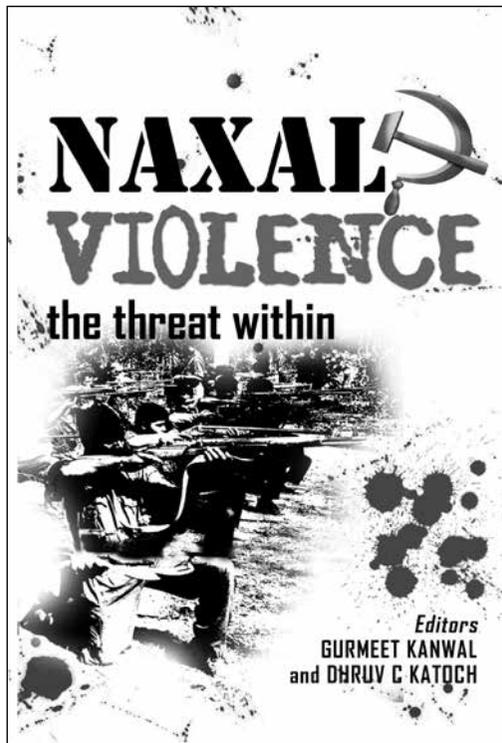
Modi and Xi face similar challenges, according to Antholis, with each carrying a responsibility to govern over a billion people based primarily on their local experience to meet this challenge. “Effective” governance in China or India is actually a higher priority for local leaders. That can actually be a threat to liberal or democratic values—or both. In China, while economic liberalism is advanced, political liberalism is still in a formative stage in a few key provinces, and may not be progressing in a linear fashion. On the other hand, in some Indian states, local democratic forces are not always necessarily liberal in the sense of protecting minority rights and individual freedoms or being receptive to global engagement. That is, communalism rather than tolerance is often the higher value. Towards the end of the book, the author makes a rather strange and unsubstantiated assertion that “... liberal democratic order exists in both places and in both countries, pluralism is real and emerging.” One would be considerably perplexed as well as eager to learn as to what drives Antholis to state that “liberal democratic order and pluralism exists” in China? While it does not need to be reiterated that India’s democratic credentials are in fact a model given that democracy is so deeply ingrained in India’s political ethos, the case of China is diametrically the opposite. The Chinese official language is full of political terms that only sound progressive. None of the so-called “declared freedoms”, nor the authority of the Constitution itself, goes so far as to protect anyone who challenges the tight-fisted rule of the Chinese Communist Party. For that matter, even Xi Jinping has made clear that Western-style democracy is not for China. With independent political parties already banned in China, the authorities continue to crack down hard on lawyers, intellectuals, artists and authors who have pushed for constitutional and democratic rights.

In general, the book provides an appealing comparative picture of the emerging domestic political scene and governance style in China

and India and how both nations are pitching to the world from their respective platforms, while addressing related challenges. However, a major shortcoming of this book in terms of research is that almost all the references belong to the English language reportage. Coverage by the local languages as well as the mainstream regional press has been overlooked by Antholis, which could have, in fact, added substantially to the overall findings and narrative of the study, thus, making it far more comprehensive and credible.

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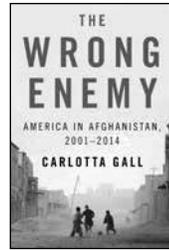


*The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan,
2001-2014*

Carlotta Gall

(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)

\$20.97



Anyone who has footslogged as a journalist in Pakistan and Afghanistan for 10 years must surely have enormous insight of the countries. Carlotta Gall's book is motivated by her experience and perception of Pakistan's doublespeak and the Pakistan military's manipulation of the media to mislead its own public and its allies about the depth of its support to Islamist terrorism. The book is "about some stories which they (Pak military and the Inter-Services Intelligence—ISI) had tried to suppress", she says. For long years, the US had turned a deaf ear to what Pakistan watchers and analysts said on the matter. But when none other than America's late special envoy to the region, Richard Holbrooke wondered whether the US was not "fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country", light finally seemed to have dawned, or so Gall suggests. Was it really so?

Beginning with the Taliban surrender in 2001 when it seemed they were fully routed, the book describes how this ruthless group which had, in fact, lost all support from the people of Afghanistan, catapulted back to power, aided and abetted by Pakistan. Gall goes on to document Hamid Karzai's emergence out of nowhere, her insights revealing lost chances at forging peace with the Taliban, through Karzai, in the early days while they were on the run. For instance, Mullah Omar had offered a signed document surrendering Kandahar but Karzai did not take it. Top Taliban commander Hafizullah Khan is quoted as saying, "He (Karzai) did not understand that this was a very important document." Sure enough, a decade later, the Taliban denied ever offering a surrender. More

importantly, Gall maintains that instead of being pursued and arrested, many Taliban members could have been brought back into the fold of Afghan society in the early years with a bit of skillful manipulation of the leaders. But this did not happen. For the Americans too, the Taliban had become irrelevant.

Pakistan did not create the Taliban but it “acted swiftly to coopt the movement”. Since early 1994, Pakistani advisers were training thousands of Mujahideen, with Pakistan Army officers such as ‘Major Gul’ and ‘Col Imam’ adopting the “Mujahideen cause as their own”. Among these trainees was Mullah Omar, whom Gall portrays as a single-minded simpleton, easy for the Pakistani establishment to manipulate. When Musharraf agreed to aid the US invasion of Afghanistan, it meant ditching the Taliban which went against the very grain of “30 years of Pakistani strategic thinking”. Gall exposes the naivete of the USA and how it failed to realise that Pakistan which had “invested seven bloody years” in the Taliban was not just going to give it all up. So much so that Gen Mahmud Ahmed, the ISI Chief, refused to call off his open support to the Taliban and had to be removed from his post a day before the USA launched its attack!!

In October-November 2001, the Taliban were routed in the most dramatic way and in the shortest time. The book describes how the years 2002 and 2003 were the lowest point for the Taliban. Despised at home, and not-quite-safe in neighbouring Pakistan where most of them had sought refuge, the forked-tongue ISI only did to them what it considered to be convenient for itself at the time: senior Taliban leaders were taken into protective custody and others were left to fend for themselves.

Pakistan was, however, loath to dismantle the core of its created insurgents, the Pakistani militants and Kashmiri groups. Gen Musharraf’s confidence that it was possible to compartmentalise the different militants was questioned by his close advisers but to no avail. This, the book claims, set the foundation for Talibanisation

of Pakistani militants. For the ISI, the Taliban's isolation was a convenient opportunity to further cultivate and prop them up against the US and the administration in Afghanistan. The USA continued to extend Pakistan hefty aid, largely defence-related. However, this did not mean granting Musharraf's wishes where his Afghanistan policy was concerned. Both the USA and Karzai continued to rely on the Northern Alliance, Musharraf's traditional enemy, much against his strategic interests. The author argues that this factor contributed to Pakistan gravitating towards the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The author says that numerous reports of senior Pakistani officers protecting Al Qaeda members were never given due credence till the time Osama Bin Laden was discovered living in Abbottabad.

Washington's single-minded agenda which set it hunting for insurgents led it to use disproportionate power in Afghanistan. With the majority of the Taliban in exile and insurgency levels low in Afghanistan, the operations by the US caused much avoidable collateral damage. For instance, in July 2002, an American fighter plane attacked a wedding party in Kakarak, Uruzgan, leaving 54 dead and hundreds injured, all innocent. This US strategy persisted pretty much through the decade. The year 2009, cites Gall, recorded the worst such incident, when a US attack on another village of western Afghanistan left 147 dead. The Taliban grew in strength in the districts bordering Pakistan while the US attacked the wrong targets in Afghanistan: the wrong enemy in the wrong place, alienating itself from Afghan population in the process. Neither Karzai nor his American supporters could distinguish between the real insurgents and the old Mujahideen who could well have been mainstreamed with the correct initiatives. By 2006, the Taliban were back, active in the western and southwestern districts, amassing fighters, setting up headquarters, executing deadly suicide attacks, while Karzai and the US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were unable to bring security to the common people who were left wondering why the

US which “decimated the Taliban so quickly in 2001”, was “unable to do so now”.

Carlotta Gall’s analysis of the “suicide-bomb factory” is detailed, revealing Pakistan’s role in promoting the network on its own soil—covert recruitment, indoctrination in *madrassas*, and to their final journey. It was not till 2007 that the USA, which was concentrating on Al Qaeda, noticed seriously the links between the ISI and the Taliban. In the words of a Western diplomat, “When you are running a joint operation with another country, you don’t spy on them.” By then, Talibanisation within Pakistan was in place. In November 2007, an attack by a bomber in the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi killed 24 intelligence operatives, a case of militants “attacking their own masters”. By 2008, Gall insists, the US’ inability to thwart the Taliban was sealed.

The book discusses Karzai’s strengths and weaknesses: a super tactician when it came to negotiating, but completely removed from any facet of governing the country, propped by the US, Karzai is a true survivor, despite engaging in blatant nepotism and politics of convenience. Despite his Pashtun origin, he had no support base amongst the Pashtuns. That he has lived through over a decade when virtually every earlier Afghan leader has been thrown out, assassinated or overthrown is a comment only of his tenacity and the cussedness of the US policy. In 2010, with the Taliban at their zenith after almost a decade, the US surge came. The Taliban again melted into Pakistan. The greater concerns in the minds of the people, says Gall, were: would Pakistan continue to support the Taliban, would the Americans stay on, as all the Taliban had to do was await the departure of the Americans. What happened was that the Taliban were told by their Pakistani mentors to return and hold their ground in Afghanistan.

Gall’s Osama Bin Laden chapter—possibly the greatest episode of the Pakistani betrayal that reads like a thriller—is about the end of a man who was being hunted for over a decade by the USA, the *raison*

d'être of the intervention in Afghanistan and the US' engagement with their most favoured ally, Pakistan. Gall claims her sources indicated that Pakistan knew all along about Obama, with a separate desk handling the issue. A red-faced USA will find it difficult to accept that the most wanted criminal lived in the periphery of Pakistan's most reputed training academy incognito. Gall's book, honest and racy, forcefully tells what seems to be already known. But it would be naïve to believe that the USA was unaware of Pakistan's tacit support to the Taliban regime, in both kind and spirit. Hasn't the US always been dictated by what it considers expedient to its foreign policy at the time? Did the US not support the Taliban (the Mujahideen) in fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan? Gall rightly brings out while writing of Osama Bin Laden and his pursuit by the US: *"The attacks of 9/11 cost him everything, his bases, his followers and eventually his life, but he achieved one aim—dragging the US into war on Muslim lands and creating a great conflagration between the Western and Muslim worlds."*

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China from Empire to Nation-State
Wang Hui, translated by Michael Gibbs Hill,
(Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Harvard University Press, 2014)
\$ 26.96



The book *China from Empire to Nation State* is an introduction to the book *Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. The rise of the China debate has renewed the focus of scholars and students towards understanding the historical context of the development of China towards being a modern nation. The ideas of ‘civilisational’ and ‘modern nation’ states have been regularly used to define and discuss China. What intrigues scholars and students of China studies today is whether China will behave like a civilisational state or a modern nation-state? Can we call China a modern nation-state in the true sense of the term? With these questions in the background, this book definitely gets to answer and debate a most basic and prominent question: “Can China be called a political entity with a continuous existence across the cycles of history?” In addition to this, a most crucial idea which the author discusses in this book is the “Heavenly Principle” – how this idea was adapted and moulded with time and transformed to the idea of “Universal Principle”. This transformation also marks the evolution and change of China from an empire to a nation-state. However, to assume that the change was a linear process would be wrong. As in any other society during that time undergoing transformations, this evolution too was a result of a number of interactions and adjustments.

The author debates in detail as to how China cannot be understood with the help of any one discourse *per se*. The course of change and development which China underwent was unique and peculiar to its own situations. The use of concepts and ideas of Western theories in order to define and understand the Chinese trajectory of movement has its own

limitations. The author brings forth the debates about the development in Chinese political thought and how the domestic political atmosphere of China was shaped and modified under every dynasty. In the words of the author, "...seeing the 'imagined community' as a purely modern phenomenon offers no way to explain the transformation that China has undergone". He further adds that "China's population, nationalities, and geography are products of innumerable interminglings, migrations, wars and exchanges". He further asserts that China should not be perceived as a homogenous identity. Like any other empire/nation/country, China too has multiple layers and internal differences. The China we see today is a result of continuous interactions between the people residing within the Chinese Empire from time to time.

This book can be regarded as an important contribution to the current context of changing perceptions and identities within China. The author contextualises the debates around what and how things developed and transformed within China, moving from one dynasty to another. It also highlights the role of the Chinese interactions with other countries in shaping and modifying these ideas and identities. This falsifies the notions that China was closed to outside interaction. The author, thus, argues, "The colonial world order and its threat of intervention were the most important forces that shaped movements in the early twentieth century to establish a Chinese nation and the scope of its territorial sovereignty". To add to this argument, the author states, "Issues of war and peace that were brought about by imperial expansion played an important role in the establishment of these boundaries, and also indicated that the boundaries that later served as markers of differences between the early empire and the nation-state were, in fact, created by competition between empires".

The author rightly concludes by saying, "The Chinese revolution has generally been seen as a national revolution, but the true consequence of this national revolution has been to transform China from an empire into a sovereign state within the nation-state system". Thus, the book helps

in understanding and placing China within the international discourse as well. How China will react and behave once it realises its true position in the international order can also be analysed. Whether it plays the role of a responsible leader or member can be extracted from the notions of whether it was open to international presence historically. This book brings to the fore the idea that China was never closed to international ideas and successfully adapted and used them to suit its domestic situation.

This book highlights the fact that China's is not a non-porous identity. With the change in dynasties which China faced, there were multiple occasions when ideas and concepts entered the Chinese discourse. In addition to this, the domestic ideas and theories also underwent major transformations with time. Thus, one can say that there was change in the adapted as well as domestic concepts within China. Most of the ideas and notions were also used differently by different dynasties, depending on the geographical positioning and reach of the Chinese Empire. The book fills a big gap in the existing literature with respect to the debates surrounding the 'ideas' of which group China belongs to: a civilisational state or a modern nation-state. It is a very interesting read, highlighting the uniqueness of the Chinese situation, which makes it unputdownable for the reader.

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