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Fong, Brian C. H. (2024): *US–China Rivalry: Great Power Competition in the Indo-Pacific*

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 344 pages. £95.00

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The rivalry between the United States and China dominates the geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century, transcending the confines of bilateral confrontation. It reshapes global order, drives innovation, and redefines economic interdependencies, compelling states to recalibrate their priorities. *Brian C. H. Fong* situates this contest within enduring patterns of international politics, in which great powers oscillate between competition and conflict. In “US–China Rivalry: Great Power Competition in the Indo-Pacific”, he delivers a systematic and innovative analysis of how power, ideology, and strategy intersect in this unfolding rivalry. At its core lies the Indo-Pacific, conceptualised not only as a geographical region but also as an “imagined geopolitical concept” (p. 7). This region serves as both a theatre for geopolitical tensions and a dynamic strategic narrative. *Fong* reveals how actors such as the United States and its allies strategically wield this narrative to challenge China’s growing influence, advancing their long-term ideological and strategic ambitions while dynamically reshaping the region’s political architecture.

Fong anchors his analysis in the innovative framework of “neo-offensive realism” (p. 9), which builds on and extends the classical realist theories of John Mearsheimer to encompass the complexities of contemporary great power dynamics (Chap. 1). This approach integrates system- and unit-level explanations, addressing national, ideological, and non-state dimensions alongside military and economic perspectives. *Fong* emphasises that foreign policy decisions are deeply rooted in domestic imperatives: While the United States legitimises its global leadership through the promotion of democratic values, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) consolidates its domestic authority through foreign policy successes. Central to this competition is the Indo-Pacific, a region *Fong* traces from early geopolitical theories, such as

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Karl Haushofer's conceptions, to contemporary frameworks advanced by figures such as Shinzō Abe and Hillary Clinton. Within this space, the United States promotes a "free and open" order grounded in democracy and the rule of law, while China advances a network of economic and security dependencies aimed at reshaping regional norms. Regional actors such as India, Japan, and Australia strategically leverage the Indo-Pacific narrative to achieve diverse goals, from fostering stability to enhancing security cooperation. Territorial disputes, technological rivalries, and economic tensions reinforce the Indo-Pacific's central role in U.S.–China competition, shaped by great powers and regional actors alike.

Fong applies the neo-offensive realism framework comprehensively in Chaps. 2 through 8, synthesising systemic, national, and regional perspectives. Chapter 2 examines the foreign policy strategies of the United States and China as rival hegemonic powers, with both shaped by their respective domestic constraints. The United States secures its global hegemony through alliances and multilateral institutions, while the CCP legitimises its authority by capitalising on foreign policy achievements. Chapter 3 shifts the focus to regional actors such as India, Japan, and Australia, highlighting India's policy of strategic autonomy as a model for navigating great power competition. Chapters 4 and 5 delve into the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan: Hong Kong, described as a "geopolitical buffer zone" (p. 119), has lost its intermediary role, symbolising China's rising influence and the waning power of the West. Taiwan, in contrast, remains a focal point of military and ideological contestation, serving as a linchpin in U.S. containment strategies. Chapters 6 and 7 explore Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, where states craft independent strategies to maximise their interests while balancing external pressures. Chapter 8 pivots to South Asia, examining India's growing role as a counterbalance to China's and Pakistan's critical positions within China's Belt and Road Initiative. Across these chapters, *Fong* demonstrates how regional dynamics actively shape global power competition, underscoring the versatility of his theoretical framework.

In the final chapter, *Fong* presents four scenarios outlining potential trajectories of U.S.–China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. The first envisions continued U.S. unipolar hegemony, sustained by economic, military, and technological dominance, though increasingly improbable given China's ascent and internal challenges within the United States. The second describes a precarious bipolar stability, predicated on delineated spheres of influence and conflict resolution mechanisms but vulnerable to ideological rifts and economic competition. The third scenario foresees multipolar fragmentation, with India and Japan gaining prominence and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) asserting agency, though risking power vacuums and conflicts. The fourth and most alarming scenario predicts an escalation into open conflict, whether military or economic, with catastrophic global repercussions. *Fong* underscores that the Indo-Pacific's future hinges on the strategic choices of all stakeholders, with regional powers such as India and ASEAN playing pivotal roles. His conclusion, a call for dialogue and cooperation, provides actionable insights for policymakers seeking to mitigate risks and foster collaboration in an increasingly polarised environment.

"US–China Rivalry: Great Power Competition in the Indo-Pacific" is a methodologically rigorous and theoretically ambitious study that enhances our understand-

ing of U.S.–China relations. *Fong's* neo-offensive realism represents a theoretical advancement, integrating systemic power shifts with domestic, ideological, and regional dynamics to offer a multidimensional lens for analysing the interplay of global and local forces. His framework is compellingly applied in empirical illustrations such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, which highlight its analytical value. The scenario analysis in the concluding chapter provides policymakers with practical tools to navigate the uncertainty of great power competition. Although transnational actors and economic foundations are underexplored, these omissions hardly diminish the book's impact. *Fong's* work is a significant contribution to the field, offering profound insights for scholars and policymakers alike and underscoring U.S.–China competition as one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century.

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