expense of environment and resources? Last but not least, was the recent totalitarian turn of
the Chinese state the evidence of solid economic success, hence vitality of the country’s
“developing authoritarianism,” or the natural result of a dependent development that has
reached its limits?

The questions raised above, however, do not constitute a refutation of the book’s general
theoretical framework. Instead, they serve to enrich debates surrounding the relationship
between capitalism, democracy, and development to greater academic sophistication. And
answers to these questions would further strengthen the author’s extraordinary insights into
the identical challenges facing the entire human race: “distribution and sustainability – not
growth and wealth.” In this regard, as the author rightly put it, “neither neoliberalism nor
state capitalism is the remedy for the other.” Consequently, for the underdeveloped Global
South, the anti-developmental rules of the game as established and overseen by the Global
North do not lend justification to repressive regimes, however impressive the latter’s
development model of “wealth without freedom” appears to be during a certain period of
time, not to mention that their way of pursuing wealth stands little chance of success in
achieving genuine modernity in any meaningful way. To make the world a better place to
live for the whole of humanity, therefore, rethinking globalization is essential to bringing the
“political shell” back to capitalism in industrial democracies and to making development
goals more achievable for the developing world. This entails painful paradigmatic and
institutional innovations for the entire world in terms of building “democratic peace” and
“The Wealth of World” (not narrowly “Nations”) in a creative way. But first and foremost,
as the author cogently recommended in the Conclusion, concerted efforts should be made
by the Global North and the Global South to seek re-legitimation through “stationary
growth” and “moderate growth,” respectively.

Comprehensive, illuminating and insightful as this volume has unfolded, Guoguang Wu’s
contribution is, from all perspectives, invaluable both academically and practically.

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https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2018.1477465

Political survival and Yasukuni in Japan’s relations with China

The Yasukuni Problem (Yasukuni Mondai) is one of the most controversial and sensitive
political issues, not only in Japan’s politics but also in Sino-Japan relations. Although many
commentators and pundits have argued for “the political correctness” and moral validity of
Japan’s prime ministers’ visits to the Yasukuni shrine, a well-grounded theoretical analysis
of this theme has not been conducted. Mong Cheung, a talented young political scientist at
Waseda University, attempts to develop a rigorous theoretical explanation of various
Japanese prime ministers’ behaviors toward visiting Yasukuni in Political Survival and
Yasukuni in Japan’s Relations with China. He challenges this research agenda by using
three languages, Japanese, Chinese, and English, materials, as well as a “theory of political
survival.”
The puzzle this book tries to solve is very simple: Why some prime ministers have visited the Yasukuni shrine, and others not, even under the similar official no-visit pressure of China. While three Japanese prime ministers – Nakasone Yasuhiro, Hashimoto Ryutaro, and Abe Shinzo – gave up to visiting Yasukuni in virtual subjugation to China’s demand, Koizumi Junichiro went to Yasukuni for worship despite China strongly opposing his visit. Systemic theories the students of International Relations often turn to first have some difficulty solving this puzzle because China has consistently been against Japanese top politicians’ visits to the Yasukuni shrine since 1985. Furthermore, it is curious in terms of structural dynamics that Koizumi’s visit happened when the distribution of power between Japan and China was changing rapidly in favor of China. According to standard balance of power theory, the stronger China is, the more it can get what she wants. In other words, Koizumi should not have visited Yasukuni, since China’s pressure on him was stronger than it had been on his predecessors.

Cheung tried to find the answer to the Yasukuni visit problem by looking into Japan’s domestic politics deeply: When the visit to Yasukuni is likely to lessen a prime minister’s political weakness in the ruling party, the visit would happen for “survival” in the domestic struggle for power, even if China says no. According to his argument, the case of Koizumi visiting the Yasukuni shrine, for example, is understood as motivated by a desire to strengthen one’s political legitimacy (power) in the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party).

Suffering from weak support within the LDP in terms of traditional faction power at the beginning of his term, Koizumi strategically utilized the Yasukuni issue gradually by demonstrating a resolute stance against Chinese pressure. This stance, in return, helped Koizumi recruits potential political allies within the LDP, and consolidated his power within the ruling party by maintaining high level of public support. (8)

Koizumi’s political foundation in the LDP was weak because his political faction, the Moriha, was a political minority and at a comparative disadvantage in decision-making. In order to overcome this vulnerability, he decided to visit Yasukuni to gain the support from right-wing politicians and pro-Yasukuni interest groups. This drastic decision and action successfully consolidated his position in the LDP.

Koizumi also used the Yasukuni issue to achieve his most ambitious political goal. He pushed hard to realize the Japanese postal reform and privatization (Yusei Mineika). However, many politicians in the LDP were against his reform plan. This political deadlock was broken by Koizumi’s tactical linkage between the Yasukuni problem and domestic politics. He wanted support from Koga Makoto, a powerful old politician in the LDP and the president of the Japan Society of Bereaved Families (Nihon Izokukai). This group has strongly requested every prime minister, including Koizumi, to visit Yasukuni. Koizumi accepted this request and expected that his visit to Yasukuni would elicit Koga’s support for the reform in exchange. Finally, Koga implicitly supported Koizumi in his Postal service reform. His strategy of politically exploiting the Yasukuni controversies was successful.

The method the author uses in this book further strengthens his explanations for the Yasukuni puzzle. It seems to me that his case study of Koizumi and Nakasone is the dual use of the most and least likely case methods. Because Koizumi was not enthusiastic over Yasukuni visit, we might expect that he would not go to Yasukuni for worship. Nonetheless, he visited the Yasukuni shrine. In the case of Nakasone, he had been actively advocating state protection of the Yasukuni shrine. But he stopped visiting Yasukuni during his term. Why? The logic of political survival can provide consistent explanations: While Koizumi utilized his visit to Yasukuni to reduce his political weakness in the LDP by attracting right-wing politicians, Nakasone avoided the risk of worsening Sino-Japan relations since his political position in the LDP was relatively strong and stable. Off course, other factors such as human emotions, beliefs, personalities, moral feelings also affect a
prime minister’s political decision about whether he should visit Yasukuni or not. Unfortunately, the individual variables cannot fully explain the patterns of prime ministers’ behaviors over the Yasukuni issue. Every Japanese prime minister has his own personal attributes, yet there is some regularity in Yasukuni visits. As far as I know, only the theory of political survival can explain the pattern of Prime ministers’ decisions over visiting Yasukuni.

Cheung’s research contributed not only to explaining the puzzle concerning the Yasukuni visit problem, but also to developing the method of area studies. First, he succeeded in explaining the causes of prime ministers’ visits to Yasukuni in a consistent way. The Logic of Political Survival developed by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his colleagues is a key theory for providing a rational and parsimonious explanation of the Yasukuni problem as I mentioned before. Although many students of area studies tend to resist or deny the use of theories in the analysis of regional problems, he boldly employs a major rational choice theory in this research. I believe that this new approach to area studies paves the way for developing a connection between theories and area studies.

 Needless to say, the hybrid of theory and area studies is not an easy task. On the one hand, every theory simplifies a phenomena and offers parsimonious explanations as much as possible. On the other hand, area studies prefer a detailed and nuanced in-depth analysis of events in a certain region. In short, the goals these two types of studies seek are nearly incompatible. Cheung overcomes this academic impasse by both choosing a good theory and using Japanese, Chinese, and English sources. His multilingual skills and theoretical knowledge made this difficult research possible. Without these capacities, this kind of multi-disciplinary research may prove impossible.

One shortcoming of this book is that it makes little contribution to theory development. How can we enhance the theory of political survival by using the case of the Yasukuni problem. One possible answer to this question is that Cheung’s research proved the widthness of scope conditions and generality of this theory. This book may also serve as a strong confirmation that western rational choice theory can be applicable to Asian cases. Turning to theory development, what part of the theory was improved by this study? I cannot find clear answers in this book.

 In any case, Political Survival and Yasukuni in Japan’s Relations with China, written by Mong Cheung, provides a fresh theoretical approach to area studies, especially to the study of the Japanese politics. I recommend that students of area research employing a traditional descriptive approach read this compact but excellent book. I also hope that this book triggers more constructive arguments about the methodology for studying Japan’s politics.

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https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2018.1477466