Central to Stevenson’s analysis is a question on why the British believed that the Amherst mission would succeed in its objectives at the Qing court when the better-prepared Macartney Embassy failed. For Stevenson, this rested on a belief that the Macartney Embassy had succeeded in establishing a new basis for diplomatic conduct between China and Britain. Set over 12 chapters, Stevenson’s book follows Amherst chronologically from initial discussions in London with John Barrow, secretary to the Admiralty, to Amherst’s overland journey to Canton. The final two chapters explore the reaction at home and offer a reflection on the Embassy. For the most part, this had little impact on British public attitudes towards China. For Stevenson, however, published accounts of the mission solidified earlier views that China was ‘stagnant and dull’, ‘people suffered from a lack of freedom and progress’ and Chinese officials were both ‘pretentious and arrogant’ (p.289).

Stevenson’s exegesis makes a significant contribution to scholarship of Anglo-Chinese relations in the nineteenth century. In addition, it offers a useful point of reference to our current understanding of Anglo-Chinese relations. The book is useful in understanding the history behind the gunboat diplomacy widely employed during the ‘Century of Humiliation’ and how the subsequent ‘set of ideas’ born out of the May Fourth Movement have shaped the legitimacy of the CCP. The only concern that I had – although I point out that Stevenson does address this limitation – is the lack of Chinese-language material, the use of which would have provided a more nuanced discussion concerning Amherst’s Embassy and significantly added to the chapter on the reactions towards it. This said, Stevenson was clear that her point of discussion was within the English-language material. As such, the book will be useful for both students and researchers exploring Chinese history from an Anglophone perspective from the early nineteenth century.

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British World Policy and the Projection of Global Power, c.1830-1960, edited by T.G. Otte, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, xiv + 314 pp., £75 (Hardback), ISBN 9781107198852

Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a paradox. It was the leading world power yet had significant vulnerabilities, which became progressively more evident in the years after 1914. Too often, studies of Britain have focused on this decline in power. T.G. Otte’s edited collection seeks to redress the balance in the historiography. It takes as its inspiration the claim by Keith Neilson that indications of decline before 1914 were ‘greatly exaggerated’. Indeed, the volume is a festschrift for Neilson, a distinguished Canadian scholar of Britain’s external policies, although it wears these credentials rather lightly. It is a pity, for example, that it lacks a bibliography of Neilson’s writings. But it pays a greater tribute by exploring Neilson’s perspective on decline and two other facets of his scholarship: his emphasis on the global nature of British policies and attention to the
political and material elements of British power. The book title suggests it will explore various aspects of Britain’s international reach from 1830 to 1960. In fact, Otte’s chapter, which examines the Foreign Office as an information nerve centre, opens around 1800 and Kathleen Burk’s essay on British financial and commercial ties with South America spans the whole nineteenth century. Conversely, only one chapter — David French on Britain’s approach to counter-insurgency in its Empire — goes beyond the Second World War.

Attempting to develop a particular theme is a major challenge in a festschrift, which is usually diverse in content — a testimony to the scope of the influence of the scholar celebrated, and this volume is no exception. Its chapters vary in topics — from Hamish Ion on British influence in late nineteenth century Yokohama to Kent Fedorowich on failed efforts at an Imperial Conference in 1941, from Erik Goldstein’s treatment of interwar ambassadors to John Maurer’s scrutiny of the British response to the naval challenge of Wilhelmine Germany. They differ in scale: some wide-ranging, others narrower in focus. Both Burk and French range across more than a century, whilst Otte covers 140 years. On the other hand, G. Bruce Strang’s essay concentrates on a single year, 1937, as he deftly explores the difficulties London faced in trying to apply economic sanctions against Japan in response to its aggression in China.

Otte’s adept introduction gives the book a sense of direction. He identifies three material facets of British power: the projection and use of force; trading prowess and financial capacity; and the ability to mobilise Imperial resources, raw materials, and manpower. To these, he adds the role of diplomacy and London’s place as the political and commercial centre of the Empire that gave the country ‘a form of information hegemony’ (p.8). The 12 chapters that follow are all engaging, thorough, based on substantial archival research, and clear in analysis and argument. Each one makes an important contribution to our understanding of its particular themes. But given the aim of challenging the dominant strand of decline in the scholarship, it is disappointing to find so little on how each of the studies fits into the existing historiography.

Otte’s excellent study of the way the Foreign Office gathered, stored, and analysed policy-relevant information and Goldstein’s careful study of British ambassadors, 1919–1939, capture the strengths but some of the strains and reducing influence of key institutions. John Robert Ferris’ compelling chapter focuses on what was the most voluminous source of First World War intelligence: the work of the War Trade Intelligence Department, which intercepted 80 million telegrams, 25 million radio messages, and over a billion letters. French’s consideration of British Imperial control suggests that the deployment of ‘minimum force’ was not as restricted as sometimes claimed. In Palestine, the Canal Zone, Cyprus, and British Guiana, it operated with some restraints, meaning casualties were roughly equal between the authorities and insurgents; but in Malaya, Kenya, Oman, Nyasaland, and Eastern Malaysia, the restraints were less noticeable, leading to greater casualties amongst the insurgents than amongst the authorities. Douglas Delaney, Strang, and Fedorowich draw out the value of Imperial connexions. For all the often-frayed relations, the Empire multiplied British power – evident in the huge numbers of Indians, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders, who fought in the Second World War. Burk conveys the vibrant British financial and business networks in South America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Zara Steiner and Dominic Lieven explore attitudes and opinions. Steiner compares the outlook to the prospect of war in 1914 and 1939. Lieven, in the one study that approaches British power from the perspective of another country, paints a fascinating picture of Russian elite views in the decade and a half before 1914 with their mixture of suspicions and common concern about Germany.
Although the cumulative effect of these studies demonstrates the complex combination of ingredients facilitating continued British influence, in the end they also capture the waning of that influence and power. Otte notes the shift in the standing of the Foreign Office from 'nerve centre of British foreign policy' to a more peripheral position and influence that was no longer predominant. 'Its decline mirrored the decline of Britain' (p.110). Burk observes that the British financial and commercial networks of businesses and banks might have been wide-ranging in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but they had to yield to the United States in the 1920s. 'Against all the power of the continent, the country was forced to retreat’ (p.128).

In sum, this skilfully edited volume succeeds in its central purpose of challenging readers to look more closely at the interconnected material, organisational, political, and other less tangible components of British power and continued global presence as the world shifted from Britain’s high noon to the era of American predominance.

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**Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey**, by T. G. Otte, London, Allen Lane, 2020, 896 pp., £35.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780241413364

This engaging biography is a sympathetic and fitting tribute for a statesman to whom Clio has not always been kind. T.G. Otte makes a convincing case for the importance of his subject who “left a greater mark on British life and politics than some who have held the highest office, setting a foreign policy course which subsequent British governments followed in its broad outlines until the Suez crisis” (p. xxiii). Many will know of Sir Edward Grey as the man who masterminded British foreign policy in the crucial years before the First World War. Otte’s account makes clear how earnestly Grey strove to square a circle of foreign policy commitments and desires, and how upholding the European balance of power became increasingly impossible when others in the Concert were less intent on it.

The Great War has overshadowed Grey’s legacy and reputation. When congratulated on becoming the longest serving foreign secretary, Grey reflected, “The war, although unavoidable, will always mark the memory of it” (p. xxiv). Indeed, the war, whose outbreak he tried to prevent until the last moment, is inseparably linked to Grey. His critics were united in their view that he was the civilian equivalent to the donkeys who allegedly led British troops into disastrous battles. David Lloyd George was perhaps the most influential and most vicious detractor, claiming that Grey’s “personality was distinctly one of the elements that contributed to the great catastrophe” (pp. xxiv-xxv). His damning indictments have become the mainstay of revisionists.

Grey was right to predict that his achievements were unfairly reduced to a focus on the war. To redress this balance, Otte devotes ample space to Grey’s political career and private life before, during, and after the war and opens a vista into Victorian and Edwardian Britain from Grey’s vantage point. Readers will profit