Taiwan might be misplaced, given Beijing’s repeated assertions that any independence move would be met with invasion. Also, why are Russia and China assumed to be the West’s enemies? Are we perhaps setting up two overlapping Cold Wars that the West cannot hope to win? Lastly, O’Hanlon’s scenarios might have been more useful if he had more thoroughly fleshed them out, providing brief fictional stories instead (the Senkakus scenario is particularly thin; this is ironic, given the book’s title).

There is also a more immediate problem with O’Hanlon’s thinking on asymmetric defence: sanctions were imposed on both China after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 and on Russia following the annexation of Crimea and its support for insurgents in eastern Ukraine in 2014. In neither case did sanctions produce major foreign policy changes. If anything, both countries became more intransigent. Sanctions seem to work better against regimes in smaller countries with weak economies, such as the ones in place on Myanmar (Burma) after 2000, or on vulnerable economies such as Iran. I would like to see a second edition that addresses these issues more thoroughly.

Joel Campbell, Troy University, Global Campus, Japan–Korea


As Tim Winter asks at the start of Geocultural power, China is rising, but is it also ‘a rising cultural power’ (p. xii)? Winter addresses this by looking at the revival of ‘Silk Road’ discourse promoted by the Chinese government since 2013, examining it primarily from the perspective of the ways in which history and heritage have been deployed as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the wider ideas of ‘Silk Roads’ from which the BRI takes some inspiration.

In the process, this book brings together a number of ideas and approaches, rather like the BRI itself. A key point of departure is the idea of ‘heritage diplomacy’, the ways in which historical artefacts have been used to support particular diplomatic messages. As Winter makes clear, this is not just a Chinese practice. Indeed, it is a feature of the original terminology of the Silk Road itself, which emerged in the nineteenth century from ‘an episode of exploration and research that took shape within the competition for control over Central Asia’ (p. 60). In the twentieth century, though, heritage diplomacy was captured by states, often as an aspect of nation-building. But the re-emergence of discussions of silk roads in the twenty-first century challenges this privileging of the nation-state, as ‘the idea of the Silk Road shifts discourses of governance and patrimony over archaeological sites, buildings, and landscapes from a previous nation-state framing toward a more expansive notion of a mutually shared transnational past’ (p. 32).

This speaks to the wider connectivity goals of the BRI across infrastructure and trade and investment as well as culture, which Winter explores in chapter four. As he notes, these are not new, and ‘dreams’ of a (re-)integrated Eurasia have been set
out in many forms before the BRI (pp. 18ff.). Winter starts the book by saying that Chinese president Xi Jinping’s ‘ambitions are to defy borders and integrate Eurasia’ (p. xi), though the emphases on sovereignty and borders remain important parts of Chinese foreign policy and this engenders contradictions in the BRI.

Winter’s arguments are supported through a number of empirical examples, from the development of museums to ‘objects of itinerancy’ such as ceramics (chapter five). There is quite a bit of discussion of the ways in which the Ming dynasty voyages of Zheng He have been presented, not just as part of Chinese heritage diplomacy, but also elsewhere, such as in Sri Lanka. This is a good example of the concept of ‘smoothing’ deployed by Winter, where a figure such as Zheng He is appropriated for narratives of friendship, cooperation and exchange, downplaying ‘inconvenient’ or confrontational parts of history in the process. This reflects the wider goals of China’s use of the Silk Road metaphor as part of a ‘strategic attempt to soften and alter the nature of China’s engagements’ (p. 17).

Bringing these threads together is the concept of ‘geocultural power’. The ‘geo-’ prefix is a popular one in these days of the ‘return of geopolitics’, and there is something of a realist emphasis in Winter’s discussions of related International Relations literature, though he uses ‘geo-’ more precisely as the ‘power accumulated by organizing and operationalizing geographical space’ (p. 17). The launch of the BRI certainly seems to indicate an increase in China’s geocultural power, and perhaps in the cultural sphere there is less pushback from China’s neighbours (and the United States) than in the infrastructure investment promoted under the BRI.

Winter does not engage as explicitly as he might have with the reams of literature published over the last few years attempting to explain and theorize the BRI itself. But Geocultural power still contributes to those debate, and in particular to the ideas of those who see the initiative as a broad conceptual framework instead of a detailed plan, or a somewhat eclectic assemblage through which various heterogeneous but interconnected things hang together. In looking at the cultural aspects of the revival of Silk Road discourse, this book offers a refreshingly different approach to the already much-studied BRI.

*Tim Summers, Chinese University of Hong Kong and Chatham House, Hong Kong*

**North America**


Richard Ned Lebow’s latest is a book that is both frustrated and hopeful. It is based on a broad set of reflections resting on 60 years of writing and thinking about a multitude of topics, but crucially about international relations and the United States. It is frustrated because Lebow argues that many of the shared assumptions of the ‘national security establishment’, whether Democrat or Republican—let alone the crude admonitions of Trump—are essentially counterproductive. It is