

On balance, implementing Gans and King's proposals would probably incrementally improve on the status quo in the sectors they consider. However, the authors could have taken greater care in developing and explaining their ideas and could certainly have suggested bolder reforms.

Reviewed by Rajat Sood

The Geopolitics of East Asia: The Search for Equilibrium
by **Robyn Lim**
Routledge, London, 2003
198 pp, \$89.00
ISBN 0 415297 176

Professor Robyn Lim, an Australian, holds the chair in international relations at Nanzan University in Japan. Prior to this she held posts with the Office of National Assessments, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and at various Australian and South-East Asian universities.

In a time of strategic flux and the relative decline of ideology as a major cause of strategic friction, *The Geopolitics of East Asia*, and the message of its subtitle, provide a timely reminder of the geo-strategic tectonic plates underlying the East Asian region irrespective of the ideologies, personalities or diplomatic fads of any particular time.

The book's thesis is that the geopolitics of East Asia has several underlying themes of geostrategic continuity underwritten by geography, economics, culture and the continual search for strategic balance between the great powers since the 17th century. A key argument deployed is that there is an East Asian

quadrilateral comprising Russia, China, Japan and the United States, and that the tensions between them result from the quest for equilibrium irrespective of their comparative strengths or the ideologies governing each one at any particular juncture.

This is a daunting task in a book the publishers specified must come in under 80,000 words. Professor Lim accomplishes her aim with an introductory essay, five historical chapters, a chapter covering contemporary issues and a conclusion. All include the broad perspectives, incisive analysis and forthright language that make Professor Lim stand out among what often passes for contemporary tenured academic thought and discourse. While a book of this length on such a broad topic must, of necessity, include much synthesised content her summaries also feature original observations that add to our understanding of the broad and bold themes explored.

Chapter 1 discusses East Asian history from the beginning of the 16th century to the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905 following Japan's defeat of Russia. In her second chapter Professor Lim discusses the unstable balance in East Asia between 1905 and the mid 1930s that led, almost inexorably, to World War II. The strategic contest between Japan and the United States, egged on by Stalinist Russia, is covered in Chapter 3 with most of the discussion centering on the contests of the 1935-41 period, rather than the detail of the cross-ocean maritime campaigns that destroyed Japanese power over the ensuing four years.

The final two chapters cover the Cold War. The penultimate summarises the myriad political currents swirling round decolonisation, the rise of communist aggression and the resultant offensive and defensive wars to contain it. The last discusses the latter phases of the Cold War from the West's defeat in Vietnam to its eventual triumph over the Soviet Union (and belligerent

Maoist zealotry) by the late 1980s.

In the final chapter Professor Lim touches with a sure hand on most of the major contemporary strategic issues, developments and trends. These include the seemingly perpetual misunderstandings between China and Japan; the various unification imperatives, WMD threats and intelligence gathering complications stemming from the division of Korea; the continuing strategic and moral dilemmas over Taiwan; the effects of the Islamist terrorist threat on great power cooperation overall; and China's strategic ambitions in its surrounding seas, South-East Asia and the western Pacific.

In her conclusion she notes that fluctuations among the powers comprising the quadrilateral can be expected to continue and neatly pierces several recurring myths and delusions that reinforce the quest for diplomatic certainties and comfort rather than a propensity to confront this and other strategic realities. Professor Lim warns that growing economic interdependence, the spread of democracy and multilateralist urges will not necessarily guarantee stability and peace in the region or more broadly. She also counsels against neoisolationist urges in the US, and the doubtful opposing beliefs that enduring strategic accommodation between the US and China is either inherently unobtainable or can be easily achieved.

The 14 pages of notes buttress the high standard of the book overall. As well as the usual citations they include numerous brief explanations and the background to issues that would otherwise clutter the main text. The five-page bibliography is comprehensive. It is also laid out in a format that is easily readable, an increasingly uncommon phenomenon in modern publishing. Finally the eight-page index is effective in a work of this length, especially in a subject area bedevilled by changes in the historical usages of spelling foreign names among two alphabets and three character systems.

Professor Lim has, however, been badly let down by her publisher in regard to the only two maps, both small but large-scale, monochrome versions. One covers, on one page, the region bounded by northern Australia, the Arctic Ocean, Moscow and the Aleutians. The other depicts the North-East Asian region centred on Manchuria. Both maps are marked with small print but still fail to detail or otherwise easily indicate many of the locations mentioned in the text. A work on geopolitics requires clearly drawn, readable and comprehensive maps, not the third-rate versions offered here.

The Geopolitics of East Asia, within its limitations of size and requirement for summary rather than detail, is a masterful work. Its occasional oversimplification invokes the odd twinge of reflexive counter argument but the book contains no obvious or serious errors of fact. This is a book which has the sure touch of both an unbowed practitioner and a scholar, and in both cases one comfortable with the milieu of debate in North America and North Asia rather than just Australian perspectives. It should be required background reading for Australian diplomats, strategists and senior commanders and those who aspire to otherwise comment on Australia's national strategy.

One final question the book generates is why Professor Lim has not been snapped up by a university or think-tank in her own country. She would certainly be a breath of fresh air in a country where strategic debate at an academic and wider level has greatly suffered from an insufficient turnover of participants over the last three decades, and more recently a marked degree of intellectual atrophy. Perhaps her reputation for being a somewhat hard-edged critic of the academically complacent has told against her. On the evidence of *The Geopolitics of East Asia*, Australia is much the worse for her apparent intellectual exile.

Reviewed by Neil James

The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100: Europe, America and the Third World

by **Robert William Fogel**
Cambridge University Press,
New York, 2004
216 pages, US\$24
ISBN 0 521 00488 8

This short book, written by a Nobel laureate in economics, is a fascinating read, dealing with issues of long-run macro-level importance. I doubt any book published this year has as many astonishing facts and convincingly argued assertions per page.

The book consists of two concise and important essays (Chapters 1-3 and Chapters 4-5) and a postscript, each of which can almost be read independently. The first essay convincingly links, over the last three centuries, dramatic developments in the availability of calories and essential nutrients in some developed nations to significant improvements in the average health and longevity of those nations' populations. The result has been an extraordinary increase in the capacity of the average person to engage in work and pleasure, leading to substantial increases in productivity and reductions in inequality. This in turn, Fogel emphasises, has synergistically facilitated better average access to calories and nutrients.

Fogel's second essay looks at the implications for healthcare in the light of the long-term changes just discussed. Fogel argues that we should not be concerned about, but rather expect and welcome, dramatic increases in healthcare expenditures. In a society as productive as those of the developed nations, expenditure on food, shelter, and work-saving devices in the home amounts to a

relatively small proportion of average total income. Consequently, people want to spend more time and money on leisure and health. In Fogel's view, removing constraints on individuals' ability to spend more on health can foster a health revolution that (again synergistically) will drive economic growth in the next century. Fogel also makes a strong case that growth in demand for healthcare in developing nations such as India and China will lead to much greater growth in expenditures, as a percent of total output, than in developed nations.

The second essay is also concerned with inequality in healthcare. Specifically, Fogel argues that the US should increase: pre- and post-natal care, especially for poor single mothers; targeted education of those poorly *informed* in health matters; periodic health screening in schools through to year 12, especially in poor neighbourhoods; convenient access to public health clinics in underserved poor neighbourhoods, as without ready access, even the insured do not use healthcare facilities; and international health aid.

Interestingly, Fogel does not see the large percent of uninsured Americans as being a substantive problem. Instead, the issue is inequality of access, which he argues convincingly would not be solved

by increasing insurance coverage. Moreover, he notes that merely increasing insurance coverage by taxation would be largely regressive. (On a personal note, my nearly 15 years as an insured individual in the US compares unfavourably to what I experienced in Australia between 1973 and 1990 in three respects not addressed by Fogel: high personal administrative costs in dealing with insurance companies, doctors and hospitals; lack of access to healthcare facilities outside of weekdays between

