

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**T.V. Paul, *The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024, 263 pages. ISBN 9789360458621 (Hardback)**

In *The Unfinished Quest*, T.V. Paul, a leading international relations and South Asia scholar, examines India's "checkered path" toward higher regional and global status since its founding as a modern nation in 1947. Navigating this well-organized, incisive, and engaging book of eight chapters feels like embarking on an exploratory journey and disembarking on an insightful note on what the future holds for India in this quest and whether it can become the "swing power" capable of countering China's "aggressive rise" in the Indo-Pacific region.

The introductory chapter flags off this journey against the background of the surge in the Sino-Indian confrontation as part of the "international contestation" occurring in the Indo-Pacific region. Chapter 2, with its pithy title "The Pursuit", highlights the continued lack of formal international recognition of India as a major power and unwraps the layers of "key motivations" behind the Indian elite's international status quest, including the "moral bases" and the "systemic constraints" on this pursuit. Paul's mention of "a racialized international order" jolts one into considering that even after checkmarking a comprehensive rubric of great power status, a nation would confront the labyrinth of social recognition.

Chapter 3 assesses India's status in terms of hard-power markers, raising an important question of whether its "hard power is of consequence to other leading actors (p. 70). Similarly, Chapter 4 illuminates India's soft power assets and points to the ineffective utilization of some of them as well as the "countervailing factors." Even though India's soft power has been critically examined in the existing literature, the significance of this chapter is tied to the overall assessment of India's great power quest while offering critical insights such as in relation to the soft power-hard power balance.

Chapters 5 and 6 form a critical component of the book inasmuch as policies and approaches of great powers and neighbours alike matter in investigating their accommodation of India's status. In this context, Paul dexterously packs the wide geographical expanse into a concise explanatory frame with key observations. In particular, as Paul notes, "In the years ahead, India is likely to increase its global status even without gaining much new leverage in the South Asian region" (p.160).

The discussion on the external environment concerning India's status ascension is complemented by domestic factors under the umbrella of "state capacity" (Chapter 7). One would agree with Paul's identification of the weak state syndrome and the economic strategy with an insufficient focus on inclusive growth as constraining factors. Chapter 8, a forward-looking final chapter, is significant in several ways. One, it identifies key "status markers that set India apart" (p.192), including economic, military, science and technology, demographic dividend, and soft power domains, and provides a critical appraisal for each, engaging the reader in a thought-provoking dialogue. Two, it justifies why India deserves a place among the major powers. Interestingly, the reasons stated in

this context differ from the civilization premise usually put forward by Indian elites and scholars. Third, in discussing implications for understanding international status, it portrays a realistic picture of “status politics” in the international system. Importantly, Paul’s observation prophesizes the significance of India’s ascent: “If India’s ascent and accommodation takes place peacefully, it will challenge the dominant theoretical and empirical narrative that great power status is achieved only through spilling the blood of oneself and others” (pp.204-05).

True to his style, Paul has condensed a complex subject into a compact analytical piece. This work makes a phenomenal contribution to the applied realm of status in international relations and should immensely benefit those investigating status from a socio-psychological perspective. *The Unfinished Quest* is a must-read for public policymakers, academics, and scholars and students of India’s foreign policy and international relations. Readers in general should also find this book interesting.

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Indian Journal of Asian Affairs

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**Quansheng Zhao, *Great Power Strategies: China, the United States, and Japan*. New York: Routledge, 2023, 312 pages. ISBN 9781032287850 (Hardback)**

With so much global attention on geopolitics in East Asia, Quansheng Zhang, professor of international relations at American University in Washington, D.C., offers an authoritative account of the great power rivalries among China, Japan, and the United States over Taiwan and North Korea.

Zhao’s timely and insightful analysis is of great significance at three levels. First, Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy has shifted from the stage of theorizing to that of prioritizing mutual defence and military cooperation. The Indo-Pacific region, spreading from Japan and South Korea through the Philippines and Taiwan to the Indian Ocean, is perceived by the United States as a single military theatre that demands well-coordinated deterrence and deployment operations. As far as the US is concerned, the immediate goals are to ensure maritime navigation and to lead joint defence operations against North Korea’s military adventurism and the rising challenges China poses. Japan and South Korea appear to have repaired the frayed relationships caused by colonialism and war. Both nations are now providers of regional security.

Second, the US-led Indo-Pacific coalition is aimed at reconciling the logic of defence planning with the task of military logistics operations in times of crisis. Although the control of territory lies at the heart of Indo-Pacific disputes, such conflicts are likely to occur along maritime frontiers. The contest for oceanic control is more direct and intense than the pursuit of crisis management and escalation dominance during the Cold War, when a superior power could deter rivals from challenging an accepted international order. China is reportedly on high alert, fearing that the new Indo-Pacific alliance would become a *de facto* Asian NATO. The idea of an Asian NATO is not new. Shortly after