



Asymmetry and International Relationships

By Brantly Womack

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Power is real, but it does not always prevail. This book explores how disparity structures international relationships. Beginning at the bilateral level, the relationship between the smaller side and the larger side can be normal as long as the smaller does not feel threatened and the larger can assume that its capabilities are respected. However, the smaller can be tempted to brinkmanship, while the larger can be tempted to bully. Asymmetric conflicts are often stalemated because the limited commitment of the larger side is met by the smaller's mortal resistance. In multilateral situations, asymmetry shapes patterns of uncertainty and attention. In global systems, how hegemony treats their subjects is the unobserved sand shifting beneath their feet as they look toward their challenger. Since 2008, the US has retained primacy but not dominance. The management of asymmetric relationships in a multinodal world will determine how power matters in the current era.

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Asymmetry and International Relationships By Brantly Womack Bibliography

- Rank: #1929700 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-12-31
- Released on: 2015-11-24
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

'Womack explores the dynamics of asymmetrical relationships in international relations, including unequal bilateral relationships and patterns of asymmetry in multilateral settings. He finds, inter alia, that asymmetric conflicts are often stalemated when the limited commitment of the larger side is met with 'mortal resistance' by the smaller side.' *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*

'Some books tell you all you want to know about a subject; some tell you more than you want to know; some don't tell you much at all; but some raise questions in your mind, provoke new thoughts, and lay the groundwork for further research. To his credit, Brantly Womack's *Asymmetry and International Relationships* is that last kind of book.' David A. Baldwin, *H-Diplo*

About the Author

Brantly Womack holds the C. K. Yen Chair at the Miller Center and is Professor of Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia. His research focuses on Chinese politics and international relationships in East Asia. His most recent books include *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (2006), *China among Unequals* (2010), and *China's Rise in Historical Perspective* (2010). He has worked closely with universities and research institutes in China, Vietnam, and Taiwan and was given the China Friendship Award in 2011.

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