

Technological values have “trumped all others,” “decimated historical memory,” and “infiltrated education to the point of limiting the humanities and undermining their force.”

There’s a considerable intelligence operating in these pages. An English professor at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Russo brings to his task an astonishingly wide range of reading, from ancient philosophers to modern novelists. He joins a well-established tradition of cultural critics who have shared many of the same concerns, including Henry Adams, Lewis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, and Wendell Berry. He’s especially perceptive about the ways

The Future Without a Past is especially perceptive about the ways technology may have led us into a predominantly visual culture.

technology may have led us into a predominantly visual culture, a culture whose inattention to “the word” has left language devalued, and whose sense of connection to the past has atrophied almost beyond restoration.

The irony is that the decline of the humanities has been facilitated by the fecklessness of the disciplines’ most visible and honored practitioners.

Though stimulating, Russo’s book has some weaknesses. Its allusiveness and amorphousness combine to make it a challenging read. Moreover, Russo sometimes seems to assume what he wishes to prove. He takes the pervasiveness of the omni-technological life-world as a given, without providing the sort of evidence and argument that might persuade skeptics. Nor does he offer practical prescriptions for remedying the unfortunate condition he diagnoses. (More than once, he mentions monastic withdrawal as a method that worked in the past and might work now—though, to his credit, he acknowledges that such an approach may be “far-fetched.”) And he doesn’t help his cause when he gives in to hyperbole: “Never in the 500-year history of humanism in the academy has it been more disadvantageous to be a humanist—intellectually, socially, culturally.”

Still, the book’s failings are inseparable from its

considerable virtues, which in the end outweigh its faults. *The Future Without a Past* deserves a wide reading, particularly by those who believe that our technological enmeshment will substantially influence the future of our discourse, and who fear that, as Ralph Waldo Emerson long ago put it, “things are in the saddle and ride mankind.”

—Wilfred M. McClay

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

Warily Watching China

TO THE DISCOMFORT OF MANY Asia-watchers in the United States, China is rapidly expanding its influence in Asia. In this new book, Robert Sutter, a former Asia specialist with the U.S. government who now teaches at Georgetown University, carefully explores Beijing’s growing regional presence and what it may mean for the United States.

**CHINA’S RISE
IN ASIA:**
Promises and Perils.

By Robert G. Sutter.
Rowman & Littlefield.
297 pp. \$24.95

China has plainly become a major regional actor, but not necessarily a menacing one. As Sutter sees it, China today is less a challenger to the status quo



George W. Bush, shown here with first lady Laura Bush on the Great Wall in February 2002, has visited China three times during his presidency, but the future of U.S.–China relations remains uncertain.

than a contributor to regional order. Beijing seems content to abide by Deng Xiaoping's dictum to bide time while continuing to amass national power. But, Sutter warns, China could adopt a more aggressive posture in pursuit of its long-standing desire to secure its periphery from potential rivals.

Much like any other country, Sutter's China seeks to consolidate its strengths, expand its influence over neighbors, and thwart efforts by other large powers to impinge upon its interests—hence its active leadership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and other international associations that don't include the United States. This is a foreign policy of pragmatism and careful calculation, not of ideology or inherent aggressiveness. It's a policy extremely sensitive to other powers, pushing and probing to gain incremental advantage but pulling back when it bumps against superior force. Foreign adventures have no place among China's priorities; the preoccupation of its leaders since the end of the Cold War has been to reinforce their continued rule through political stability and economic growth.

The United States looms large in these pages. Though not a neighbor in a geographical sense, America remains the preeminent power in Asia—an uncomfortable reality that shapes Beijing's every move on its periphery. And, as Sutter emphasizes, Washington is no passive observer; American action (and inaction) substantially influences Chinese policy in the region. China, in Sutter's apt phrase, is less a "responsible" than a "responsive" power. To reduce the likelihood of Beijing's becoming disruptive, he advises, the United States must pursue a firm and consistent policy, specifying clear lines that must not be crossed.

Sutter judges George W. Bush more successful than Bill Clinton in managing this difficult relationship, in part because of Bush's readiness to use power to punish U.S. enemies. Beijing has adopted a more accommodating posture toward the United States since mid-2001, based not on an embrace of Washington's notions of good international citizenship, but on a simple assessment of costs and benefits. Yet, Sutter warns, suspicion and opposition toward U.S. policy in Asia remain a "driving force"

in Chinese calculations. For American policymakers, he counsels a delicate balance. The United States must maintain its resolve to ensure that China stays on a generally constructive track in Asia, but it must also welcome China's recent signs of accommodation, lest Beijing revert to a less benign approach.

Sutter is properly modest in his assertions, freely conceding that the contradictory and inconclusive evidence about Chinese strategic thinking can support different conclusions. Many experts will judge unduly pessimistic his assessment of the most probable future of U.S.–China relations: the pursuit, by Beijing, of increased influence at the expense of American interests in the region. Others will admire his forecast as hardheaded. But no one will accuse him of naiveté about Beijing's long-range intentions. And that shrewdness is the great virtue of this entirely laudable book.

—Robert M. Hathaway

Liberty and Security

IN THE NAME OF PRO-
tecting security since 9/11, top
government officials have
redrafted the rule book on Amer-
ican civil liberties. Philip
Heymann and Juliette Kayyem,

Justice Department officials in
the Clinton administration who now teach at Har-
vard University, take careful stock of this profound
shift in law and policy. In a remarkable and timely
book, they seek to balance the competing demands
of security and liberty, not simply in the abstract but
through precise and detailed prescriptions.

They begin by cataloging recent security
practices that "have too often given insufficient
weight to concerns about democratic freedoms,
human rights, lawfulness, and international
relations." Due process requirements for suspected
terrorists have been loosened, government secrecy
has expanded, and the right to privacy has been
reduced. Thousands of undocumented aliens have
been rounded up and held in U.S. prisons and

PROTECTING LIBERTY IN AN AGE OF TERROR.

By Philip B. Heymann
and Juliette N. Kayyem.
MIT Press. 194 pp. \$30