

Dear Reader,

In early 2020, Columbia Global Reports published *Vigil*, by the East Asian historian Jeffrey Wasserstrom, which predicted the crackdown on protest and civil liberties that the government of Hong Kong initiated a few weeks later. Wasserstrom's prescience and expertise drew a good deal of positive attention to the book.

With *The Milk Tea Alliance*, Wasserstrom returns to look at where protest in East Asia is going now. The title refers to a loose companionship between pro-democracy activists in three countries where people prefer to drink their tea mixed with dairy products—unlike people in the region's dominant power, China, who don't mix their tea with anything. Through many years of deep engagement in the region, Wasserstrom has earned a rare degree of trust from these activists. This enables him to give us intimate pictures of the lives and activities of significant rising leaders who are not familiar to American readers: Netiwit Chotiphathaisal, in Thailand, Agnes Chow, in Hong Kong, and Ye Myint Win (known as Nicky Diamond), now living in exile from Burma. He also sketches out more broadly the situations of the democracy movements in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Burma.

The days when people were predicting that China and its neighbors would naturally move toward democracy now seem like ancient history, but *The Milk Tea Alliance* is a profoundly optimistic book. By vividly showing us the courage and determination of his main characters, and their ability to attract a following, especially in the rising generation, he leaves us hopeful that the region's slide toward authoritarianism can be halted or reversed, and that a better future is possible.

Best,



Nicholas Lemann  
Director, Columbia Global Reports