LSE RB Year in Review: 12 Most-Read Book Reviews of 2021

What were you reading in 2021 on LSE Review of Books? We count down the top 12 most-read new book reviews published in 2021 on the blog.

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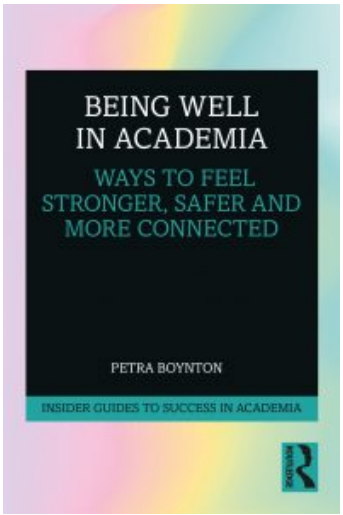
12. *Being Well in Academia: Ways to Feel Stronger, Safer and More Connected.* Petra Boynton. Routledge. 2020.



Petra Boynton provides a practical guide on how to recognise and confront the various issues that can arise from being in academia. Chris Featherstone welcomed the book for offering a succinct overview of the challenges that can be thrown at those studying or working in academia and a useful toolkit for addressing them.

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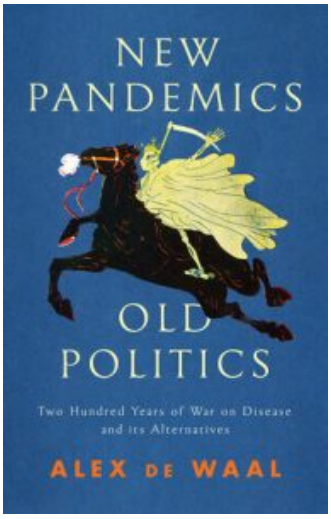
11. *New Pandemics, Old Politics: Two Hundred Years of War on Disease and its Alternatives*. Alex de Waal. Polity. 2021.



Alex de Waal offers a new political history of epidemics, identifying and critiquing a repeated mobilisation of the 'war metaphor' of pandemic disease to show our persistent (mis-)framing of biological illness. Hannah Farrimond found the book an extremely comprehensive and fascinating history of previous epidemics, their metaphors and manifestations, and a highly thought-provoking read in our current times.

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10. *Decolonizing Politics: An Introduction*. Robbie Shilliam. Polity. 2021.

Robbie Shilliam explores the colonial and racist logics enfolded within the history of political thought while also identifying decolonising moves within the discipline. Sudhir Chella Rajan wrote that the book is infused with new possibilities and optimism, providing practical solutions for scholars keen to go beyond power-laden racialised and gendered categories of thinking.

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9. *The Pay Off: How Changing the Way We Pay Changes Everything*. Gottfried Leibbrandt and Natasha de Terán. Elliott & Thompson Ltd. 2021.

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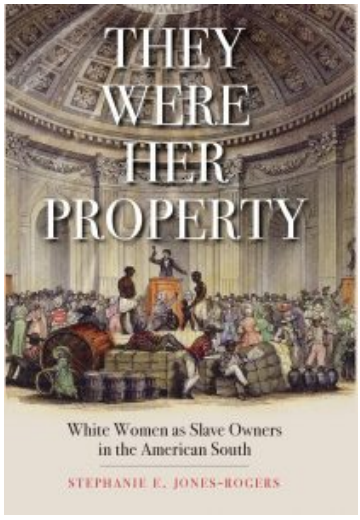
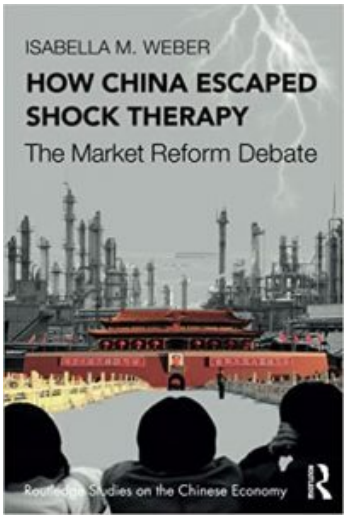
Gottfried Leibbrandt and Natasha de Terán offer a new account of the history and workings of payments infrastructures, showing how the movement of money is crucial to understanding financial power today. Martin C. W. Walker deemed the book an essential first step for those looking to understand the possible future of the payments industry and its impact on the global economy.

***8. They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South.* Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers. Yale University Press. 2019.**



Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers challenges the idea that white women were passive bystanders to the slave economy in the US, instead demonstrating their active participation in its structures of brutality and exploitation. Compellingly written and centring the testimonies of formerly enslaved people, this award-winning book was praised by Ben Margulies for offering an important contribution to both historiography and understandings of contemporary politics.

***7. How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate.* Isabella M. Weber. Routledge. 2021.**



Isabella M. Weber explores the contestations behind China's path to economic reform, showing how it committed to 'experimental gradualism' rather than the shock therapy of immediate market liberalisation. George Hong Jiang found that this meticulous and wide-reaching book sheds light on the history of marketisation reforms in China and the factors that led it to escape shock therapy.

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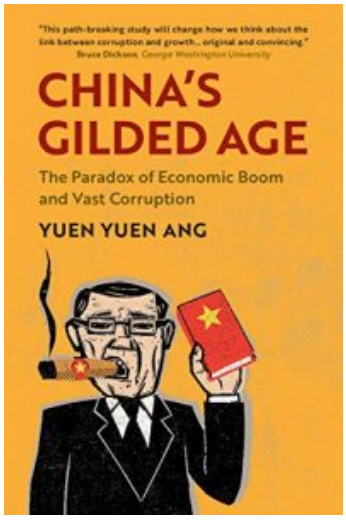
6. *China's Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption*. Yuen Yuen Ang. Cambridge University Press. 2020.



Yuen Yuen Ang examines China's growth trajectory through the prism of corruption, challenging the notion of Chinese exceptionalism when it comes to corruption by comparing its rise to the growth of the US in the nineteenth century. In a review translated into Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese, Diego Castañeda Garza anticipated that the book will encourage readers to look beyond the cliches surrounding corruption by offering a comprehensive framework for studying the political economy of inequality and development.

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5. *Leaving Academia: A Practical Guide*. Christopher L. Caterine. Princeton University Press. 2020.

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Christopher L. Caterine provides practical advice for those in academia who are considering changing careers. Eryk Walczak recommended this book as a great read for both early-stage PhD students who might want to prepare a Plan B and more seasoned academics considering working in non-academic roles.

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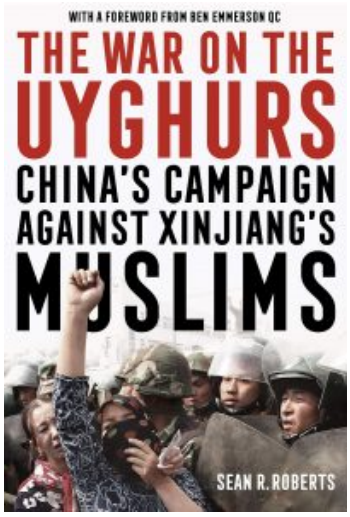
4. The War on the Uyghurs: China's Campaign Against Xinjiang's Muslims. Sean R. Roberts. Manchester University Press. 2020.



Sean R. Roberts offers a new account exploring how the US-led global 'War on Terror' has been used by China as a cover for the persecution of the predominantly Muslim Uyghur population. Charles Dunst recommended the book as an empathetic and deeply informative work for those hoping to understand the humanitarian crisis in Xinjiang.

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3. Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization. Achille Mbembe (trans. by Daniela Ginsburg). Columbia University Press. 2021.

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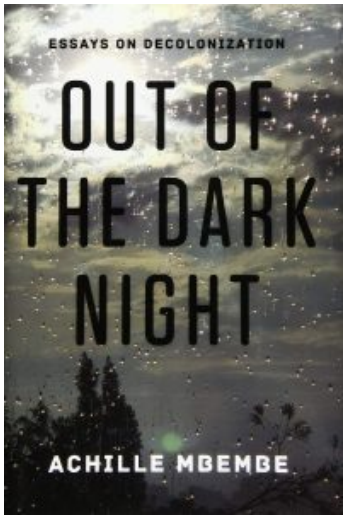

Achille Mbembe offers a new collection exploring the complexities of decolonisation, intervening in debates about French democracy, African modernity, the aspirations of postcolonial thought and the possibilities of imagining community on a planetary scale. Ayça Çubukçu reviewed this poetic and consistently erudite work, exploring the vision of humanity that Mbembe imagines across the collection.

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2. *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain.* Sathnam Sanghera. Viking. 2021.

Sathnam Sanghera offers a new critique of the history of the British Empire and its continuing impact on British society, drawing on secondary source material, personal experience and sharp enquiry. Ramnik Shah found this candid and informed book to be deserving of all the plaudits heaped on it.

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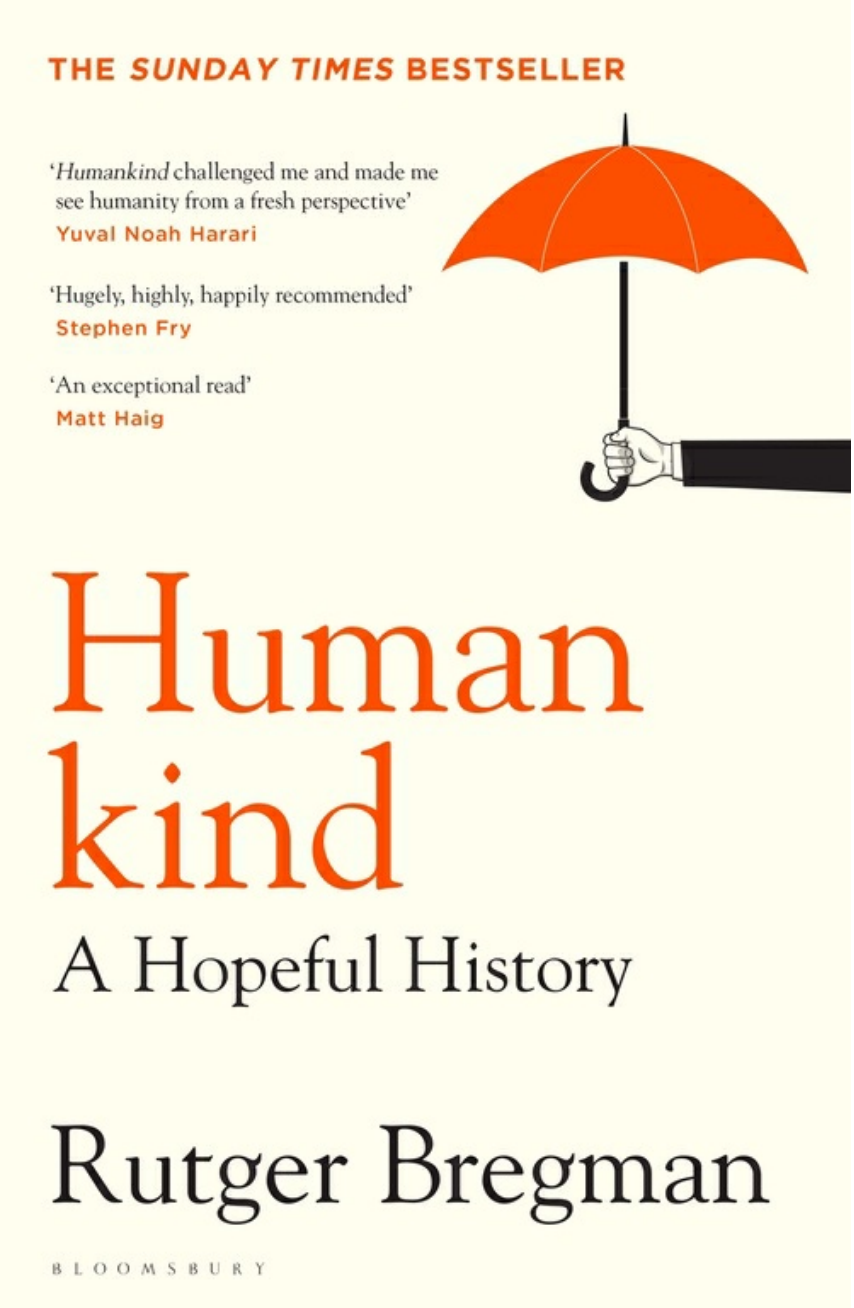

***1. Humankind: A Hopeful History*. Rutger Bregman. Bloomsbury. 2020.**

Rutger Bregman takes the reader on a journey that dismantles the assumptions of classic research on human nature that positions humans as self-interested, instead exploring how humans can use our inherently good nature to build a better society. In the most-read new review of 2021 on LSE Review of Books, Rosie Hamilton welcomed the book's perspective for offering a genuinely optimistic alternative that encourages readers to view the world from a different angle.

Note: The reviews in this reading list give the views of the authors, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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