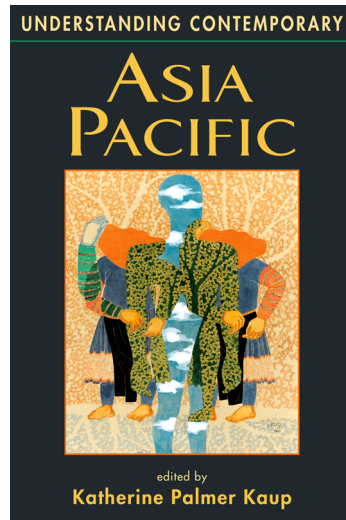


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1

Introduction

Katherine Palmer Kaup

The countries that stretch from the dry grasslands of northern China to the island tropics of southern Indonesia represent some of the most widely varied in the world: from one of the few remaining monarchies in tiny Brunei, to the world's largest communist regime in the mammoth People's Republic of China (PRC). China's huge and rapidly expanding economy stands in stark contrast to the small and troubled system in neighboring Laos. Dozens upon dozens of ethnic groups live in the area, speaking hundreds of local languages and observing a wide variety of religious and other cultural practices. Why even discuss these countries together? Why write a book that focuses on the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Japan, East Timor, and the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam)? Why not divide the region, as so many analysts do, into smaller regions, like Northeast Asia (including the Koreas, Japan, and China) and Southeast Asia (including the ten ASEAN states), or why not focus on the Pacific Rim and include all countries that border both sides of the Pacific, including Russia and the United States, as well as several Latin American states?

Though the ASEAN states, China, Japan, the Koreas, and East Timor constitute one of the most diverse regions of the world, they also represent a group of countries that is increasingly interdependent and aware of common interests. Particularly since the devastating Asian financial crisis in 1997, these countries have been strengthening their regional alliances and interactions and developing a host of "Asia-only" institutions such as ASEAN Plus Three, designed to increase ties among ASEAN states, China, Japan, and South Korea.

The United States and others outside the region have had to reformulate plans to retain their presence within, in the face of this rising sense of Asia Pacific community (Revere 2005).

The economic and political rise of Asia Pacific has been characterized by many as threatening. The international community, and perhaps the United States most of all, has been particularly anxious about the rapid rise of China, politically, economically, and increasingly militarily. The US Defense Department's 2006 annual report to Congress on the military power of the People's Republic of China, for example, notes that not only does China have the "greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States . . . and over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages," but China's failure to clarify its reasons for dramatically increasing its military capabilities forces "others to hedge against these unknowns" (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2006:4). One congressman from California was much less diplomatic in his description of China as "an aggressive nuclear-armed bully that now threatens the world with its hostile acts and proliferation" (Rohrabacher 2001). Policymakers, scholars, and casual observers alike have clearly recognized the growing influence of the region, and responded in widely differing ways, from seizing opportunities for greater interactions to the creation of think tanks, associations, and lobbying organizations to counter the region's economic, political, and social rise. The 1997 Asian financial crisis brought into clear relief just how interdependent the world's economies have become, as has the recent popular recognition that China holds \$1 trillion in US Treasury bonds. Common interests in thwarting international terrorism and the spread of epidemic diseases have also reinforced the need for greater cooperation.

At what point in time should one begin to explain developments in "contemporary" Asia Pacific? How far back does one need to go to understand contemporary trends, particularly in a region of the world with such a strong sense of pride in its thousands of years of history? Some background of cultural and historical traditions is clearly essential to understanding the key themes and patterns from the past that continue to influence events in Asia Pacific today. Placing our primary focus on events and trends since 1945 seems a clear choice, however, as new regimes emerged in almost all of the region's states from the rubble of World War II and the retreat of the colonial powers in the years that immediately followed.

The historical, political, economic, and cultural dynamics since the end of World War II within Asia Pacific have been so varied and complex that few analysts have dared to examine the region as a whole. Within academia, policymaking circles, and economic organizations, analysts have become increasingly specialized, often focusing their studies on a particular issue within a single country, rather than on broad trends occurring across the region. While it is possible to find experts on individual ethnic groups in China, for example, it is more difficult to find specialists on China's ethnic minorities generally,

and extremely rare to find those with expertise on ethnic groups throughout the region. The plethora of languages and diversity of experiences among those living in the region complicate cross-border and transnational studies.

Failure to “connect the dots” among the various disciplines and countries, however, will leave the student at best with a narrow understanding of the region, and at worst with a distorted view of what motivates and influences those within the area. To date, very few attempts have been made to understand the extremely diverse traditions and dynamic changes occurring in Asia Pacific through a multidisciplinary approach. Yet this is exactly what is needed in order to identify common patterns of interaction in the region. We need to understand how each of the topics covered in our volume intersects and informs action within the region, to assist us in navigating relations with those living in the region, and to learn from one another, explore areas of common interest, and avoid conflict bred from miscommunication. In bringing together leading scholars from a variety of disciplines, with decades of fieldwork experience throughout the region, it is our hope to provide a broad, interdisciplinary introduction to the trends occurring across one of the world’s most exciting regions. Though each of the chapters in this volume can be studied independently, read as a whole they provide uncommon insights on how culture, economics, politics, and international relations intersect with one another to shape dynamics in Asia Pacific. As the rest of the world charts a course for responding to Asia’s rise since World War II, it is crucial to be familiar with each of the issues collected here by leaders in the field.

Asian political and cultural diversity is reflected in the region’s varied geographical terrain, which ranges from tropical forests to stark deserts, from imposing mountain ranges to deep gorges, and from vast expanses in the northern grasslands to thousands of islands scattered across the southeast. Historically, the mountains, deserts, and archipelagos have divided communities and left peoples speaking hundreds of local languages, practicing a wide array of religions, and professing loyalty to a variety of ethnic groupings. The impact of Asia’s geography can be seen in each of the topics addressed throughout our volume, from its effects on transnational migration patterns across time, to growing economic disparities across the region, to the rise and fall of security alliances.

While the region exudes a sense of forward movement and drive to modernize, it remains heavily influenced by its past. Citizens in the region tend to have a much longer historical worldview than is commonly found in the West. Almost any traveler through China is likely to have heard contemporary issues explained through reference to China’s ancient past, for example. After first explaining that “China is a big country, with a long history, and a lot of people,” many Chinese are as likely to attribute current weaknesses in rule-of-law development to China’s first emperor’s brutal use of legalism in the second century B.C.E. as they are to current party controls over the judicial system.

Colin Mackerras's historical overview of migration patterns, agricultural development, traditional ethics, the rise of key states, and the expansion of Western colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sets the stage for understanding many facets of contemporary Asia Pacific.

After Ron Hill and Colin Mackerras sketch the geographical and historical setting, our chapters turn to developments since World War II. Asia Pacific lay in utter despair in 1945, after nearly a decade of regional warfare. An estimated 10 million people were killed in China alone during the second Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945), which destroyed infrastructure and economies throughout the region. More than 6 million Japanese soldiers were demobilized after the war, and returned to a shattered economy and a newly restructured political system that seemed incapable of supplying them with jobs. Hundreds of thousands of citizens were left homeless and unemployed throughout the region. Even after more than a decade of recovery efforts, the per capita income of the average Japanese was barely 10 percent of the average American's; South Korea was no better off economically than many of the poorest countries in Africa; and widespread famine was feared across parts of the region. Few analysts predicted the rapid economic and political rise of Asia that would begin to sweep the region by 1960.

The spectacular economic rise of Asia Pacific has led many to describe the phenomenon as “the Asian miracle” (World Bank 1993). Between 1960 and 1985, Japan and the four “little dragons”—Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea—doubled their incomes every eight years. By 1990, more than 650 million people in East Asia had been lifted out of abject poverty, leaving less than 10 percent of the population in that category, compared with 25 percent in Latin America, and more than 50 percent in black Africa and on the Indian subcontinent (Rowher 1995). Asia Pacific and South Asia produced only 19 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 1950, but produced almost a third of total GDP by 1998, and the World Bank predicts that this figure will rise to nearly 60 percent by 2025 (Kristof 2000:12). China's per capita GDP has increased more than tenfold since 1945, and many of the other countries in the region report enviable growth rates.

Each of the regimes that came to power in the years after World War II, many of them governing newly independent states, had to deal with the legacy of the Western powers' involvement in the region. As these new governments tried to build cohesive nations within the often arbitrarily drawn boundaries imposed by the colonial powers, and as they struggled to create effective state institutions to handle the pressing needs of development, they often resorted to coercion and concentrated state control over society. Though heavy state involvement in the economy and tight government control over society may have led to rapid national economic development, they often came at a heavy cost to individuals' liberties. While state economies boomed in many countries across the region, individual living standards remained low. By the 1980s, as

their economies improved, as internal challenges to state control gradually became less intense, and as the countries became more involved in the global economy and world order, governments across the region began to loosen their grip over society. Whether the countries chose communism, military rule, or some form of restricted democracy in the first decades after World War II, by the early 1980s the region witnessed a general easing of state repression and a liberalization of political rule, albeit with periodic setbacks.

Despite the generalized trend toward liberalization beginning in the 1980s, the Asia Pacific countries still have extremely diverse forms of government; perhaps in no other region of the world are the differences so pronounced. Brunei is run by an absolute monarch who shows little inclination to reform. Japan's parliamentary democracy continues to serve as a role model for democratizing nations like South Korea, while the military junta in Burma shows little sign of easing its stranglehold on the Burmese population. In Chapter 4, on politics, I note the common challenges of nation building, state-building, and economic development in the countries of Asia Pacific; each initially chose some form of communist, military, or restricted democratic rule, yet each has moved away from trying to concentrate power principally in government hands and stepped toward liberalization and granting greater power to citizens. Though students may at times feel overwhelmed as they grapple to understand the radically different forms of governments in the region and the rapidly shifting policies of each, I provide a framework for recognizing general patterns of governance among seemingly disparate systems, and for tracing common trends in shifting power from central governments to the citizens of the region.

How were so many of these countries able to prosper despite their radically different forms of governance? Common patterns arising from diverse experiences also become apparent in Kailash Khandke's analysis of the region's economies in Chapter 5. Focusing on the factors contributing to the rapid economic rise of the high-performing economies and on how these countries' economic choices in many ways paved the way for the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Khandke shows how state policies and unique historical circumstances combined with Asian cultural and political norms to allow these states unprecedented growth from the 1960s through the 1990s. Most of the Asia Pacific states now appear well on their way to economic recovery after the crash of the Thai baht and the "contagious" spread of the economic crisis.

The economic and political development choices made by each of the Asia Pacific states influenced their relations with one another as well as with countries outside the region, as Derek McDougall describes in fascinating detail in Chapter 6. Perhaps the defining choice that most clearly determined patterns of international interaction, particularly in Northeast Asia, was whether states would adopt communism or more market-driven economies. The ideological division between the communist states of China, North Korea, and Indochina

and their noncommunist neighbors dramatically affected how the United States and Russia interacted with each state, and thus altered their interstate dynamics. Although the Cold War division was important in both Northeast Asia and in the southeast, the more fragile and newer states in the southeast were more heavily influenced by regional concerns than they were by the great powers. With the collapse of Cold War divisions since 1991, national governments across Asia Pacific have devoted fewer resources to securing domestic control and more to addressing security concerns beyond their respective borders, as Robert Sutter outlines in Chapter 7.

Economic and political choices have also had a dramatic impact on the environment in Asia Pacific, as Peter Hills's sobering account in Chapter 8 reflects. The communist development path imposed a heavy toll on the environment as the communist states raced to industrialize at whatever cost. The failure to tie natural resource use to market prices has led to overutilization of resources and diminished care for sustainable development. Rapid urbanization throughout the region, discussed by Hills as well as Dean Forbes in Chapter 9, has led to startling increases in air and water pollution, and significant global warming. Conversion of land for agricultural use has led to massive deforestation, soil erosion, and water shortages throughout much of the region, particularly in the People's Republic of China. Despite Hills's grim outline of the current state of the Asia Pacific environment, he leaves us with some hope that new awareness of and commitment to sustainable development may be able to ease the region's environmental devastation.

Forbes continues Hills's discussion of rapid urbanization throughout the region, and examines the problems of population controls and managing new demographic challenges. New efforts to control population growth rates, and improvements in health and human services, have contributed to the aging of the Asia Pacific population. While some countries, like the PRC, are banking on economic growth to answer future challenges of caring for the elderly, others, like Japan, where it is predicted that over 40 percent of the population will be age sixty or older by 2050, have begun to experiment with a number of new policies to meet the challenge before it turns to crisis levels. Combating poverty and managing migration into the already overburdened megacities will continue to challenge most of the Asia Pacific countries.

Another challenge governments face in managing their populations is how to handle the diverse ethnic communities living within their borders. As I detail in Chapter 10, Asia Pacific's ethnic mosaic is extraordinarily complex, as ethnic communities have emerged over time in response to intragroup elite efforts to build a sense of common destiny, and in response to changing environments and state policies. Governments have tried a host of approaches to managing ethnic competition, including excluding certain groups, assimilation, integration, preferential treatment for privileged ethnicities, and regional autonomy schemes. As state policies shift over time and in response to new

contingencies, they at times are able to control ethnic conflict, while at other times these policies only exacerbate such conflict. More than 10,000 lives have been lost in Indonesia as a result of ethnic strife since the early 1990s, and in China the government's policy in the country's northwest appears to be fomenting interethnic tensions. Only through properly understanding how ethnic groups originate, and properly assessing their needs, can governments hope to formulate proper policies.

Governments have also had to address another important segment of the population: women. While women have traditionally been treated as second-class citizens throughout much of Asia Pacific, improvements have been made, as shown by Yana Rodgers in Chapter 11. While gender inequalities continue and are particularly pronounced in the poorer countries in the region, women have made great strides in health, education, and the labor market. Several legal reforms have been promoted that, while incomplete and not always well enforced, have at least begun to lay the framework for women's rights. Once laws are recorded and a rights regime is developed, women can begin to push for the rights they have been promised theoretically.

Religious influences have affected the position of women throughout Asia Pacific, and have had a major impact on nearly every aspect of life in the region. The richness of diversity in Asia Pacific is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the religious traditions found throughout the region. All of the world's major religions have played a role in the spiritual life of the region, as Keri Cole describes in Chapter 12, blending with, shaping, and being shaped by one another in the interactions of local and foreign influences. While Buddhism has the largest numerical representation in the region, Islam is not far behind, and the number of Christians, though far below that of Buddhists and Muslims, is on the rise. Though Hinduism is today found primarily only in Bali, it has merged with the other traditions to create a unique blend of faiths in Southeast Asia.

The rich changes occurring in the Asia Pacific societies in terms of cultural, economic, political, ethnic, spiritual, and gender relations are vividly reflected by Fay Beauchamp and Ely Marquez in Chapter 13, on literary traditions found in the region. Ranging from oral storytelling to postmodern theater, the literature of Asia Pacific is as dynamic as the region itself. Beauchamp and Ely trace how the major literary forms reflect themes that pre-occupy these diverse cultures.

While few predicted in 1945 that Asia Pacific might one day rival the power of Western Europe and the United States, today it is precisely this concern that keeps attention focused on this vibrant region. In our final chapter, Brantly Womack distinguishes three broad trends in Asia Pacific since World War II that help students both make sense of the complex changes occurring in this dynamic region and inform our understanding of the area's future prospects. He discusses how changes in geography, societal choices, and

external interactions have all shaped contemporary developments and future prospects for Asia Pacific.

Casual observers and policymakers alike all seem to have strong opinions about the region, whether they see it as the next frontier for economic development and cooperation or as a dangerous military rival. Yet, quite worryingly, few have the necessary tools for understanding the region. It is our hope that this volume will provide students with a strong foundation for further study. As students explore the interactions among culture, economics, and politics in Asia Pacific, we hope they will begin to appreciate developments in the region and discover common ground for engaging with those living within it. For it is only through increased understanding that we can move toward a future of global cooperation and mutual respect, rather than one of distrust and conflict.

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