

Yahuda, Michael (2011).

The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific (Third Edition).

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In his speech to the Australian parliament in November 2011, Barack Obama emphasised that he has directed his national security team to make the United States' presence and mission in the Asia-Pacific a top priority. Unlike European politicians, their Australian counterparts were pleased to learn that the reductions in US defence spending would not come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific. However, as readers of Michael Yahuda's outstanding study will understand, Obama's announcement has not marked a significant policy shift: Since the end of World War Two, Washington has been the hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific in the realms of security and economics. Yet, as Yahuda, Professor Emeritus of International Relations at the London School of Economics, demonstrates, China aims to challenge the United States' dominant position. This development is likely to change the fundamental dynamics in the region.

Accordingly, Beijing's dramatic economic and military ascent over the last 35 years, and particularly during the last decade, and Washington's relative decline during the same period, have given the author an incentive to re-write major parts of *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific*. The book consists of eleven chapters, organised into two sections (1945 until 1989, and the post-Cold War period). While the first part, presenting a thorough analysis of the main political, economic, and security developments from 1945 until 1989, remains more or less unchanged compared with previous editions, the second part offers new, updated insights into the major trends since the end of the Cold War. This is especially valuable, as the author missed out on some of these trends in the second edition of his book.

Yahuda's theoretical and methodical approach is eclectic as he draws on Neoreal-

ism, Neoliberalism, and Constructivism to describe the overall pattern of cooperation and competition in the Asia-Pacific. Despite this mainstream approach, Yahuda's analysis is highly complex: First, he includes an assessment of the national systems of the US, China, Japan, and Russia to demonstrate how international, regional, and domestic developments influence each other in the Asia-Pacific. Secondly, even though the main geographical focus rests on North-East Asia, the other Asian sub-regions are also covered in depth and their interlinkages highlighted.

In the historical part, Yahuda provides an excellent analysis of the strategic interests of the US, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan after 1945. He demonstrates the paramount importance of the Korean War (1950–53) for the establishment of the regional Cold War order: Wary of the Sino-Soviet alliance, Washington was keen to normalise its relations with Tokyo. Due to the peace treaty of San Francisco in 1951, Japan re-entered the political and economic sphere in the Asia-Pacific. As Yahuda shows, the US-Japanese axis became the main structure in the region and bilateralism the method of choice. Still distrusting Tokyo, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines successfully pressured Washington to make political and military concessions in their bilateral defence treaties. These agreements further cemented the US predominance.

Similarly to Europe, the Cold War was the dominant regional political, military, and economic structural force shaping the politics of all nations. Unlike in Europe, however, in the Asia-Pacific the Cold War was a hot one, culminating in the Indochina War. The alliance system was further complicated after the collapse of the Sino-Russian alliance in the mid-1950s, when the Communist parties in the Asia-Pacific had to side either with Moscow or Beijing. Due to geography and ethnicity, the majority of the South-East Asian Communists turned to China. Both Moscow and Beijing supported rival Communist rebels, particularly in South-East Asia (e.g. Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines).

Ideological rivalries but also distrust dating back to the Colonial period were also responsible for multilateral cooperation remaining elusive, even among staunch Western allies such as South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Australia. However, Tokyo indirectly laid the seeds for regional collaboration in the mid-1970s: Due to the increasing labour costs in Japan and the appreciation of the Yen, Japanese companies started to shift labour-intensive production processes to

South-East Asia. Gradually, the complex production networks of today emerged, interlinking various economies in the Asia-Pacific.

The second part of *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific* starts with a study of the new power relations since 1989 while the other three chapters deal with the US, China, and Japan. Similarly to Europe, the importance of multilateral institutions and norms is growing and regional collaboration has increased. Even though Yahuda stresses the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for furthering regionalism in the Asia-Pacific, he is critical about ASEAN's real power, labelling it a "diplomatic community" (pp. 213-218). Despite the 2008 ASEAN Charter, regional cooperation remains limited in South-East Asia – yet it is still much deeper than in North-East Asia. The reason is that the dogma of sovereignty and non-interference prevails in the Charter.

In fact, more important for the promotion of regionalism in the Asia-Pacific are China's multilateralism and a general trend toward comprehensive security. Similarly to Washington's hub-and-spokes approach, until the mid-1990s China pursued its interests bilaterally. Since then, however, it has increasingly joined the multilateral institutions established by ASEAN. In common with the Association, "China's cooperative security approach was well suited to addressing these new security matters" (p. 211). Realistically, due to China's geographic size and economic power, transnational threats such as climate change, terrorism, organised crime, and migration can only be resolved with Beijing's involvement. This, however, further strengthens its regional influence.

While economically all nations in the Asia-Pacific have become increasingly dependent on China, strategically the majority of them still rely on America's engagement. Therefore, even during President George Bush's heavily criticised one-dimensional 'war on terror', Washington's leadership has not been contested. As Yahuda points out, both a conflict and a condominium between the US and China would be detrimental for the resident nations. While he predicts sharper diplomatic exchange and growing military tensions in the South China Sea, he does not believe that a full-scale war is likely to break out (pp. 341-346). Beijing, as Yahuda convincingly argues, relies heavily on a peaceful international climate to promote trade, investment, know-how, and technology transfer for its economic growth. However, China's future domestic political and social development raises many questions, in particular

anxieties about growing nationalism which, once unleashed, can be difficult to control even for an authoritarian leadership.

Apart from China's rise, two other developments have gained pace in the last two decades: India's re-engagement with Asia and Russia's increasingly marginal position. Yet, as Yahuda shows, not only have the traditional power relationships in the region changed, but also the region itself: Globalisation, increased trade, and multilateral fora have had a significant impact on the geographic boundaries of the Asia-Pacific as they have "become less precise' as Central and South Asia increasingly impinge on Southeast and Northeast Asia" (p. 341).

The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific is a well-written textbook that offers both experts on the Asia-Pacific and readers less familiar with this part of the world a comprehensive and concise analysis of the major developments since the end of World War Two. The analysis of South-East Asia is precise, and both the analysis and its length, compared to the parts on North-East Asia, demonstrate that for most of the time since 1945, South-East Asia has been an ally but also a dependent partner of the great powers with limited strategic influence in actively shaping politics in the Asia-Pacific. Yet it forms a crucial part of a dynamic region where multilateral collaboration has increased but obstacles for a peaceful future still remain. The future direction of strategic relations between Beijing and Washington is written in the fate of this dynamic and promising region.

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