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Introduction to *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*

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Why Asia?

This is a comprehensive survey of the politics of Asia, with a focus on contemporary times. With a population of 4.5 billion, Asia constitutes 59.69 percent of the world’s population.\(^1\) Geographically, it is divided into East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia, according to the United Nations’ designation.\(^2\) This classification is more for convenience than it is set in stone. For instance, conceptually, West Asia coincides with the Middle East, a region that has distinct features of its own. Therefore, this handbook deals with East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia, not West Asia.

Comparatively speaking, Asia is still a poor continent. Its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is about half of the world’s average.\(^3\) But Asia leads the world’s growth at 5.3 percent, compared with the 3.4 percent of the world’s average it represented in 2016 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).\(^4\) The US economy expanded about 3.5 percent in 2016. According to the predication of Asian Development Bank (ADB), if the current trend continues, by 2050, the GDP per capita of Asia will reach the current level of Europe. The impressive economic performance of Asia in the last few decades made experts call the 21st century “The Pacific Century” (Pilling, 2011).

Culturally, Asia is highly diverse. It has all the major religions of the world: Chinese in most of the East Asian countries; Islam, mostly in South and Southeast Asia, with Indonesia the largest Islam country in the world; Hinduism, mostly in India; and Christianity in countries such as South Korea and the Philippines.

The scholarly studies of Asia: theory and methods

The study of the politics of Asia often falls into the scholarly domain of “comparative politics.” “Comparative politics” is among the half a dozen major subfields within “political science,” e.g., “international relations”; “political theory”; “public administration”; and, in the United States, “American government and politics.” The subfield that is closest to “comparative politics” is “international relations,” with the former emphasizing the domestic politics of foreign countries and the latter focusing on country-to-country relations. The difference
is a matter of emphasis, not a difference in nature. This handbook, although it focuses on “comparative Asian politics,” also discusses the foreign policies of those regions and countries covered.

Knowledge is comparative by definition. Referring to the well-known book *Democracy in America*, Alex de Tocqueville remarked, “Although I very rarely spoke of France in my book, I did not write one page of it without having her, so to speak, before my eyes.” He also remarked, “Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed” (Pierson, 1938).

Comparative politics as a subfield in political science was established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States. At the beginning, it focused on the study of Europe. Traditionally, it was also noted for formal legalism, focusing on such things as constitutions and cabinets, and conservatism, focusing on those areas that were unchanging. It lacked theoretical rigor and sensitivity to methods. In recent decades, comparative politics has moved toward behaviorism and become more sensitive to the formulation of concepts, hypotheses, and explanations in systematic terms. It has also become more empirical in terms of research methods as well as more interdisciplinary, e.g., including political economy and political culture (Bill and Hardgrave, 1981, 2–20). This handbook reflects the more recent trends in comparative politics.

Most of the authors in this handbook were trained and are largely located now in the West. Most of them have used comparative politics research methods in a selective and flexible way. This was demonstrated, for instance, in the study of political culture. In studying democracy in Asia, Amy Freedman used data from Freedom House, which is a major database for freedom in the West. The analytical method she used is also a mainstream Western political culture analysis. Similarly, Yun-han Chu et al. studied East Asian political culture based on data from Asian Barometer. John Fuh-sheng Hsieh adopted a similar method in the study of the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy. Survey research in political culture is the dominant method in the West.

Many authors, however, view the politics of Asia as rather special to the area and believe that researchers should adopt different theories and methods. Commenting on China’s rise in economic power in the last few decades, Jinghao Zhou was actually against the modernization theory (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997, 155–183) in the West that believes that individualism, as a cultural attribute, provides a powerful push toward modernity. Zhou argued that the collectively oriented Confucian culture is equally, if not more, powerful in promoting productivity.

Rina Verma Williams and Nandini Deo argued that Indian religious study on Hinduism is different from study on Christianity in the West. Hinduism is not based on text, congregation, etc. It is practiced mostly at home. Mikhail A. Molchanov also talks about the difference between Asia and Europe when discussing regionalism: In Asia, the focus is on the state; in Europe, it is more on the social setting.

In discussing Asian security, Kenneth Boutin remarked that researchers cannot use security theories about Europe to analyze the situation in Asia. For Europe, security is largely between states; for Asia, security issues are broader, covering such areas as economy and demography. Also, Asian security is not a zero-sum game, as Qinhua Xu shares in her discussion about China’s energy security.

Even within Asia, scholars have taken different methodological approaches. For instance, Subrata Kumar Mitra and La Toya Waha, in discussing South Asian political culture, take a different approach from Chu et al., who studied East Asia. East Asian countries are relatively similar in religion and language, i.e., East Asian societies are predominantly atheist and until about a century ago used the Chinese writing system. South Asia demonstrates
more religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Instead of relying on surveys, Mitra and Waha's study is more interpretative. They believed that political transformation was achieved through identities: hierarchical, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, and ideology. The practice of using different methods to study political culture in different areas is productive.

Because of the complexity in the area, similar social phenomena may have different causes in the Asian context. For instance, authoritarianism in East Asia is generally believed to be rooted in the Confucian tradition. But current authoritarianism in Southeast Asia is believed by Bridget Welch et al. to be more of a result of institutions, not an authoritarian tradition. Williams et al. believe that although Hinduism has authoritarian elements, “( politicized) Hinduism as a religion may have little or no impact on the functioning of democracy.” Similarly, looking at the democratization process of East Asia, Brian Woodall noted that the most important factor contributing to democracy was external influence. The persistence of authoritarianism in Central Asia is partly due to the rich energy resources that enable the authoritarian regimes in the area to stay in power without political reform.

Jason (Chunlong) Lu and Ting Yan believe that China will have its own form of democracy, different from the Western model. Similarly, Ajay K. Mehra believes that the Indian democracy is a social democracy, not the American-style liberal democracy. Actually, with the exception of four countries under strong Western political influence, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and India, no Asian country has a political system resembling closely that of the Western liberal democracy.

Some political leaders in Asia, such as Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, and Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, also emphasized the continent’s uniqueness. They refer to this as “Asian values,” which are different from Western values (Subramaniam, 2000). The perseverance of the Asian cultural tradition was also noted by Peter Moody in the conclusion.

Because of the uniqueness of Asia, for the part on the “Three Big Powers,” all the authors selected are currently based in Asia.

The format

The handbook is divided into four parts: The first part is a comprehensive introduction to the four regions of Asia from the perspectives of “democratization,” “foreign policy,” “political economy,” and “political culture.”

Democratization: The studies of democratization gradually developed into a prominent topic in political science following the early “third-wave” transitions of Southern Europe in the 1970s and Latin America in the 1980s. Then a few East Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan, became democratic. A major question in democratization studies is whether democratization processes across the nations are comparable or not. Some believe that the democratization process is similar, and therefore, it is comparable across regions. But this is not at all beyond controversy. Scholars have also noted the relations between political culture and democracy as well as the connection between economic development and democracy (Grugel, 2003, 491–501).

Foreign policy: Domestic forces often cannot be explained without discussing external forces. For instance, authors in this handbook suggest that those Asian political systems resembling Western democracies the most are those that were influenced by external forces the most. The Central Asian countries have not made significant progress toward democratization largely because the two major powers, China and Russia, allowed it.

Political economy: The most well-known figure who noted the relations between politics and economies was Karl Marx in the mid-19th century (Marx and Engels, 1888). Economists
study how people make decisions optimizing their material well-being and are concerned with production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within markets. Political scientists study how people choose rules and policies that guide the behavior of people, with a focus on power. The overlap of the two areas is that the vast majority of government decisions involve the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. Governments regulate businesses, tax goods, and services, and make sure market functions properly (Gill, 2002, 83).

Political culture: Political culture is a set of attitudes, values, and knowledge widely shared within a society and passed from generation to generation. It is believed that a prodemocratic set of attitudes is conducive to democratic institutions (Inglehart and Welzel, 2002).

The second part of this handbook is to introduce the “Big Three” of Asia: China, India, and Japan. China is the world’s largest country in terms of population. The Chinese economy is the second largest in terms of GDP and the largest in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). China’s economy is the fastest in the world in the last three decades. India’s population is the second largest, and its economy has been developing well in the last two decades. Although experiencing stagnation in economic growth in the last two decades, Japan’s economy is the third largest, following the United States and China.

The third part of this handbook discusses some of the most important issues that Asia is confronted with, such as “institutional developments,” “human rights,” “the impact of internet on politics,” “military,” “security,” “democracy,” “nationalism,” “geopolitics and geo-economics,” “ethnicity,” and “soft-power.” These issues often transcend the subregions of East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia.

The fourth part tries to explain some critical issues that the continent is faced with, such as “Why has East Asian growth been so fast in recent decades?”; “Is it possible to have liberal democracy in Asia that has drastically different cultural traditions compared with the West?”; “Is Confucianism compatible with democracy?”; “Is Hinduism compatible with democracy?”; “Is it possible for socialist countries such as China and Vietnam to establish constitutionalism, which is rooted in the West?”; and “What has hindered women’s participation in politics, and how can the situation be improved?”

The difference between “Issues and Problems” and “Theories” is not set in stone, with the former focusing on the empirical narrative of the social phenomena, while the latter emphasizes explanation (Chilcote, 1994). Some of the articles under the heading of “Issues and Problems” are theoretical as well, e.g., the studies by Aurel Croissant and David Kuehn on the military and by Boutin on security. Some chapters that focus on regional politics, such as that by Chu et al. on the East Asian political culture, are highly theoretical as well. The categorization is more for convenience.

In conclusion, Moody looks into the future development of Asian political development.

Content analysis

In the following, I will comment on each of the chapters in this handbook, following the order of the table of contents.

Asia: democracy, foreign policy, development, and political culture

In the section on the democratization in Asia, the four authors looked at the process from the perspectives of cultural traditions, ethnicity, religion, linguistics, recent history, and the area’s relationships with outside powers, especially the United States and Russia.
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Democratization

Commenting on East Asia, Woodall identified three waves of democratization in the area, Japan coming with the first wave, followed by the second wave, which brought South Korea to democratization, and the third wave, which brought Taiwan. In addition to the influence of the United States and a favorable international environment, an important factor is that all three of these countries had export-oriented economies, thus depending on the external forces very much for economic benefits.

Looking at the democratization of Southeast Asia, Ehito Kimura’s approach is different from Woodall’s: While Woodall seems to believe that external forces are the key to democratization in East Asia, Kimura seems to believe that democratization is a dynamic process in which all major forces are in play: democracy and development, democracy and class, democracy and cultural tradition, democracy and religion, and democracy and the institutions. There is no single force that is decisive. Unlike East Asia, external force is not the main factor for democratization in this area.

Commenting on the democratization of South Asia through five key countries in the area, India, Nepal, Sir Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, Maya Chadda believes that nation building is the most important factor contributing to the unstable situation in the democratization process in South Asia. Pakistan’s democracy was not stable, largely because the nation was created after World War II (WWII), with many discrepancies, most notably religious and ethnic conflicts. Bangladesh’s situation was similar: The partition with India created many religious and ethnic conflicts as well. India was more stable among these countries because it was created earlier.

On Central Asia’s democratization process, Mariya Y. Omelicheva remarked that although the five countries proclaimed to want democracy, little progress was made. Causal factors include the authoritarian cultural traditions and external factors. Unlike the case with East Asia in which the United States pressured Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan to democratize, Russia and China themselves were not democratic and therefore did not put pressure on these Central Asian states for political change. In addition, Central Asian countries have energy resources that made them confident in not changing.

Foreign policy

The next four chapters focus on the foreign policies of the four subregions of Asia. Dennis V. Hickey and Dean P. Chen cover the foreign policy evolvement of China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea from a historical perspective. They believe that China’s foreign policy was rooted in a hundred years of humiliation by Western countries. The authors discuss the evolvement of China’s foreign policy under five generations of Chinese leaders: Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu, and Xi. The foreign policies of Japan, the Koreas, and Taiwan were influenced profoundly by WWII, the Cold War, and recent-decade US-China relations.

Focusing on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Shane J. Barter and Amanda Boralesa discuss the foreign policies of those Southeast Asian nations. The authors have found that in spite of diversity, Southeast Asian nations have similar foreign policies in recent years. Besides the European Union (EU), ASEAN is the most enduring regional organization. This is impressive because of the diversity of the Southeast Asian region, compared with the largely Christian Europe.

In contrast with Southeast Asia, as Arndt Michael found, the foreign policies of South Asian countries demonstrated more diversity in terms of interest and perceptions, with India
acting as the dominant power in the area. Regionalization is poor with extra-regional powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia playing significant roles. South Asian countries don’t trade with each other well. The rivalry between India and Pakistan is the most serious conflict in the region.

For Central Asia, Roger Kangas believes that foreign policies developed immediately after the founding of the five countries following the collapse of the former Soviet Union did not seem to be as important as domestic policies. Therefore, these newly independent states relied on the Foreign Ministry of Russia. However, with the increasing demand for energy and the “September 11 US Anti-Terrorist war,” the five countries’ foreign policies became increasingly independent, one reason being the United States’ need for their support in the war against terrorism. Currently, energy is still very important in the shaping of the foreign policies of these countries – so is trade with those outside of the region. Security issues both inside and outside of the region are low, i.e., the countries don’t feel threatened by countries inside or outside of the region. Culturally, this region, although formerly part of the Soviet Union, which was largely a European nation, has become increasingly Asian.

**Political economy**

The following four chapters focus on the political economy of Asia. The first chapter by Linjun Wu focuses on the regionalism in East Asia. The first organization of East Asian regionalism was the creation of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989. This was the result of the United States’ promotion and was in accordance with neoliberal globalization to break the trade barriers of the member states. The United States was against East Asian regionalism for fear that it would become exclusive against its own national interest. The 1997 economic crisis turned the interest of East Asian countries from Asia Pacific toward East Asia because they could not count on the US-led liberal globalization. Therefore, there emerged the ASEAN-plus-Three, followed by China’s rise.

Southeast Asia’s development in the last century has been remarkable, as Yueting Tong remarked. The success was largely due to the countries’ strong commitment toward economic development, the endorsement of liberal policies, a generally export-oriented development pattern, and regional cooperation through ASEAN. As the recent global ties against globalization indicate, the region needs to reduce its reliance on the export-led economies and enhance intra-regional collaboration.

In contrast to the overall positive evaluation of Southeast Asia, Amita Batra presented a gloomy picture of South Asia’s development in the last few decades. The region has been noted for its countries’ inability to collaborate with one another. Instead, most of the countries have sought to collaborate with countries outside of the area, e.g., Pakistan has had close cooperation with China, and India, the dominant power in the region, has tried to work closely with East Asian countries as well as ASEAN.

On Central Asia, Luca Anceschi elaborated on the two major resources that the area is rich in: energy resources and water resources. In other words, the political economy of the area is the political economy of the natural resources. The authoritarian governments in the area resorted to rentierism, and it is questionable whether this kind of development model can be sustained. The essential model of production after the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) has not changed: exporting natural resources, such as energy and cotton, to outside of the regime. These central Asian countries have made more profits because the price is no longer controlled.
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Political culture

Based on survey data, Yu-tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu, and Mark Weatherall tried to shed light on people’s orientation toward authority and the definition of self-interest in East Asia. For the first question, the study found significant differences between East Asian countries. Modernization more effectively impacted people’s attitudes toward authority. For the second question, East Asian nations demonstrated strong collective tendencies in contrast to Western individualism. The discussion on political culture theory is very detailed.

On the political culture of Southeast Asia, Bridget Welsh and Kai-ping Huang recalled the earlier political culture studies by scholars like Lucian Pye, whose findings include the Southeast Asians’ respect of authority and a strong preference for harmony. Welch and Huang also recalled the 1990s debate about “Asian Values.” Based largely on survey, they found that authoritarian attitudes still dominated in Southeast Asia. Changes in political culture are the result of a combination of factors, such as economic development level, education, and especially institutions.

On the political culture of South Asia, Subrata Kumar Mitra and La Toya Waha tried to answer two questions: “How do people acquire their political identities in different circumstances?” and “How do they differ from each other in socialization?” It was found that hierarchy, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, and ideology all contributed to the shaping of political identities. India was more successful in the socialization than Pakistan because of the former’s longer period of independence. For Bangladesh, it was more difficult because in addition to the problem of religion, there was also the problem of separation from the former India. Nepal was a kingdom.

The political culture of Central Asia was noted for informal social relations, kinship ties, and religion, which are not part of what is understood as “civic culture” in the West. According to Nalin Kumar Mohapatra, these characteristics of the Central Asian political culture were not only the result of local tradition but also the legacies of the Mongols, which were noted for unqualified loyalty to the ruler and the Russian Tsars.

Major powers: China, India, and Japan

The second part of this handbook focuses on the three big powers of Asia – China, India, and Japan – with all the authors being based in these three countries. Four chapters have been selected about China on the country’s post-Mao reforms, foreign policy, energy strategy, and the new world outlook.

China

Jason (Chunlong) Lu and Ting Yan discussed the evolvement of China’s post-Mao reform in the last four decades. Important topics covered include the relationships between the state and the market, civil organizations, and political culture. Lu and Yan argue that China’s development model may be good for its own sake: economic liberalization without political reform.

On China’s foreign policy, Baohui Zhang covered the last four decades chronologically from the Deng era, known for the famous “Hide one’s capacities and bide one’s time.” This policy orientation was largely continued for the next more than two decades under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. A major turning point was that under Xi Jinping, China officially gave up the foreign policy formulated during the Deng era. Its foreign policy has become
increasingly more assertive on the issues of the Diaoyu Island with Japan, the South China Sea with the United States, and its ambitious “One Belt, One Road” initiative.

Ye Zicheng, Zhu Xiaolu, and Steven Levine discussed China’s new world outlook by drawing on inspirations from its historical and philosophical perspectives. *Huaxia* refers to China as a civilization, not merely a nation-state. The authors tried to use the Chinese philosophical outlook regarding conflicts among states more than 2,500 years ago to interpret the current international relations. In their view, *Huaxiaism* was based on the complementary system of three schools of thought in premodern times: the Confucian model, the Shang Yang model, and the Laozi model. In international relations, a fundamental difference between the Chinese view and the Western view is that while the latter largely views international relations as a zero-sum game, the former views it as a mutually inclusive system. Although they did not mention Sun Tzu’s name, their international relations theory is very consistent with his.

On China’s energy strategy, Qinhua Xu first discussed China’s energy strategy situation in the last four decades. Then she interpreted some different perceptions of its energy strategy. She focused on its strategy’s changing from what she called “realism,” which means that the country’s foreign energy strategy was a zero-sum game, to “idealism,” which views foreign energy strategy as a win-win situation.

**India**

The next two chapters cover India’s democratization process in the last two centuries and the country’s foreign policy.

On India’s striving for democratization following the French Revolution, Ajay K. Mehra believes that generally speaking, India’s political orientation is social democracy. In the 1950s, the parliament, the Congress party, and the government formed a triangle. The Congress was at the center of the democratization from the early 20th century through the 1980s, when it lost control in the parliament. The democratization process was not smooth because of religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity as well as political partition with Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although the political system that India has established resembled more of the parliamentary system, there were voices calling for a presidential system. Indian democracy stands for secularism and is against discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and gender. The old caste system was abolished.

On India’s foreign policy, Shibashis Chatterjee’s approach is also chorological. The author first discussed India’s foreign policy evolvement from the postcolonial period through the 1990s, which was characterized by the country’s nonalignment, i.e., refusing to form alliance with either the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Then the author deals with India’s post-Cold War era, when an increasing liberal domestic policy went hand in hand with the growing ties with the United States. The current Indian foreign policy is noted for its close ties with the United States and Japan, its strategic approach to China, and its maintaining friendly ties with other Asian and African states. India’s relationship with Pakistan is still tense.

**Japan**

On Japan’s foreign policy, Sebastian Maslow surveys the formation and the process of Japanese foreign policy after WWII. He noted that the few decades following the war were noted for Japan’s pro-US stance and its focus on economics. In recent decades, as Asia has
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become increasingly important in the international arena, Japanese foreign policy was noted for the dichotomy: Asian regionalism combined with pro-US approach. This is different from Japan’s foreign policy of “escaping from Asia” immediately after the Meiji Restoration. Recently, proactive Japanese foreign policy responded to the United States’ pivot to Asia. In the last few decades, Japan’s move was also noted for its orientation toward a “normal country.” Japan also wanted to hedge China’s rise in the last three decades and have closer ties with South Korea and the United States.

Issues and problems

On institutional development of Asia, Yong Deng discussed the major regional institutions in Asia, such as the ASEAN, APEC, ADB, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRICS, i.e., Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. New regionalism differs from the premodern tribute system in the sense that the modern nation-states are sovereign. It also differs from the old regionalism of Europe in the sense that while the latter usually emerged out of wars, new regionalism, such as ASEAN, grew out of cultural, commercial, and security reasons.

On human rights in Asia, Thio Li-ann, a law professor in Singapore, first traced the historical development of human rights in Asia since the 1940s and noted the milestones, such as the Bandung Conference in the 1950s and the Bangkok Declaration in the 1990s. The second part of the chapter discusses the implementation of human rights from the international, national, and subregional levels. In a tone slightly different from the mainstream Western human rights discourse that focuses on civil rights, the author insisted that the advocacy of human rights needs to be supplemented by socioeconomic measures.

Jason P. Abbott discussed the internet’s emerging impact on politics in Asia, with a focus on Malaysia, Thailand, and China. Abbott found that in those societies that were already open, the impact of the internet was not as big as in closed societies. But the government also learned more sophisticated ways to deal with the impact of the internet on politics, such as legal means. In addition, the political effectiveness of the internet cannot be overestimated, e.g., internet protests often lack a central coordination.

On the relationship between the military and politics in Asia, Aurel Croissant and David Kuehn observed that in the early stage of nation building, the role played by the military was much needed because of its organization capabilities. However, due largely to the three waves of democratization in Asia after WWII, the role played by the military in politics was in decline in the last half a century. Military coups were in decline as well. Nevertheless, there were noticeable exceptions in which the military consistently played an important role, such as in Pakistan.

Commenting on democratization in Asia, Amy L. Freedman’s study is largely empirical and quantitative based on the data by Freedom House. She categorized the Asian countries into four groups: status quo or free, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and India; partly free, regressed; not free; and those making progress. Freedman’s general evaluation of the democratization process covered the period since 2006, when there was anti-democracy momentum worldwide. In Asia, this was demonstrated by China’s increasing assertiveness in its authoritarian control. Although Freedman attributed this regress partly to the 2008 economic crisis, economic factors alone can’t explain why some countries democratize, but others do not.

On the issue of security, Kenneth Boutin first observed that the Asian states were more heterogeneous compared with the European states. In addition, most of these Asian states
were still in the process of nation building. The most salient feature of Asian security compared with Europe was that Asian security covered broader areas, including intra- as well as international, while in Europe, it was about security of the state. Interstate rivalry in Northeast Asia was the most intense. Southeast Asia was slightly better.

On nationalism, Kam-yee Law noted that traditionally, nationalism, based on the nation-state, was a phenomenon of Europe. Asia was noted for culturalism. Since the Western incursion to Asia, nationalism became a tool used by some Asian governments to legitimize their dominance. The surges of nationalism in Asia became intense after WWII and after the Cold War. In recent years, the disputes in the South China Sea also demonstrated nationalism. However, the government’s manipulation of nationalism was challenged first of all by its negative effect for stability. For instance, the Diaoyu Island issue for China was a double-edged sword: It cannot only legitimize the rule of the Chinese Communist Party but also destabilize the society. In addition, globalization made it harder for the governments to manipulate nationalist sentiments.

On the geopolitics and geo-economics of the Asia Pacific, Peter J. Rimmer took a broad look at the Asia Pacific region. He noted that Asia’s changing political order reflects “the nexus between the scripting of a new geopolitics and the framing of the geo-economics of an interdependent world.” As an established power, the United States intends to adopt such strategies as “pivot to Asia” and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to keep its dominant position in the world. As a rising power, China intends to use its “One Belt, One Road” to defend its national interest and to expand its already significant global power status. Other powers in the region, such as Russia, Japan, India, and Indonesia, all play their own roles in the changing landscape.

On ethnicity in Southeast Asia, Joel Selway tried to answer the question “Which countries in Southeast Asia have more ethnic-based violence and why?” The author analyzed this from the perspectives of level of ethnic fractionalization, ethno-religious crosscuttingness, ethnic income inequality, and ethnogeographic intermixing. He also discussed how the governments in different countries tried to resolve ethnic conflicts by using different strategies in accordance with the countries’ special circumstance. For instance, for Singapore, ghettos are the most serious problem; for Malaysia and the Philippines, language and religion seem to be the key issue related to ethnic violence.

On Euro-Asian regionalism, Mikhail A. Molchanov noted that unlike in Europe, regionalism in Asia focuses on the state but not on social setting, and often, as a latecomer, regionalism was intended to protect against neoliberal globalization. Focusing on Ukraine and Kazakhstan as case studies, he argued that the former USSR’s way of coordinating interstate activities was passed. China started to play an active role in this area through SCOs, but it does not claim to be the leader. Regionalism will continue to develop as the neoliberalism-oriented world order cannot fully serve the needs of those countries involved.

**Making sense of Asia: theoretical considerations**

Jinghao Zhou tried to explore the question of whether Confucianism was conducive to economic development. He first defined what Confucianism was and the so-called Four Books and Five Classics (si shu wu jing). He then discussed the development periods of Confucianism. He concluded that the role played by Confucianism in the East Asian economic development was not decisive. One of the reasons was because there is no single interpretation of Confucianism. Like the Bible, it is a living document.

John Fuh-sheng Hsieh’s chapter tries to answer the question “Is Confucianism compatible with democracy?” Hsieh noted that Confucianism has elements of both the democratic and
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Some Confucian societies are authoritarian, such as China and Vietnam; others are democratic, such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Confucianism functions very much like religion, although it is secular. Taking an empirical approach, especially survey research, Hsieh found that sometimes, democratic societies want material improvement more than undemocratic societies. Conceptually, the Chinese equal populism with democracy, thus taking a position detached from Western liberal democracy. As in the previous chapter, Hsieh does not feel that cultural factor is decisive enough to determine whether a society can become democratic or not. In other words, an authoritarian culture does not prevent a society from becoming democratic.

Rina Verma Williams and Nandini Deo tried to answer the question “Is Hinduism compatible with democracy?” They seemed to agree with Hsieh that the relations between religion and politics are not “hard” but “soft.” They argued that Hinduism can have different interpretations, and therefore, its relationships with democracy were not decisive. Williams and Deo also criticize some Western theories’ interpretation of the relationships between religion and politics, such as those developed by Samuel Huntington, who focused on Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, that are text-based. Hinduism is not text-based.

Yuxin Ma tried to answer the question “Is it possible to have constitutionalism under state socialism led by the Communist Party?” Although she mainly talked about China, she also discussed other socialist countries, such as Vietnam and Laos. Constitutionalism is an essential part of the Western political system, but Chinese government’s alleged advocacy of “rule of law” sometimes became rule by law. Some Chinese intellectuals tried to figure out whether it is possible to have constitutionalism without challenging the existing dominance of the Communist Party. They advocated elections, civil society, and rule of law, which can constrain but not overthrow the party. The answer is unclear.

On gender and politics in South Asia, Vidyamali Samarasinghe addressed the question of how successful had women functioned in male-dominated South Asian societies and why. She found that in spite of a few high-profile women national leaders who became prominent through family ties, such as Indira Gandhi, women were still in a very weak position in politics. Through such means as legislations and statutes, reluctance to enact public policies that would empower women politically, and preaching traditions and customs, males were able to prevent women from effectively participating in politics. The gender quota system in elections produced mixed results.

Conclusion

Peter Moody’s conclusion has two parts: The first part talks about those areas that are not predictable, mostly in the areas of politics, economics, and military. For instance, the West predicted that the fall of Vietnam to communism would cause a domino effect. This did not happen. Many in the West also predicted that communism and poverty will go hand in hand. Again, China’s economic success in the last four decades proved this wrong. For Moody, those areas that are predictable are the cultural traditions. Modernization won’t be able to wash away ethnic differences, cultural values, and religious preferences.

Notes

1 www.worldometers.info/world-population/asia-population/.
2 According to the designation of the United Nations: East Asia: China (includes both the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan), Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, and South
Korea (population 1,624,853,705); South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (population 1,870,460,803); Southeast Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam (population 647,589,953); Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (population 69,241,030); Western Asia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia (country), Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.


References