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Security in Asian states

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Security in Asian states is a complex issue, with respect to both how it is conceptualized and the manner in which it is pursued. While there is no single regional tradition of security, there are a number of key features that distinguish security in Asian states from that of states elsewhere, producing what is usefully regarded as the Asian security paradigm. Asian states are characterized by a tendency to approach the interrelated aspects of the nature of security and security threats, and the referent objects of security in quite broad terms. This has significant consequences for security policy in Asian states, which generally is structured around the discrete pursuit of state and intrastate security objectives.

This chapter examines the characteristic features of security in Asian states, how security objectives are operationalized through policy, and how this shapes the regional security landscape. The chapter begins by considering what is signified by the term ‘security’ before examining the basis and nature of security in Asian states. The chapter then turns to security policy in Asian states, focusing on how political authorities pursue the disparate and often-conflicting requirements of state and intrastate security, and the impact this has on the regional security landscape. This study concludes by considering long-term trends in the security of Asian states. In examining their security, this study discusses broader trends in the conceptualization of security and important intra-regional differences within Asia in terms of the focus of security policy.

Security defined: survival and beyond

It is crucial to establish what is understood by the term ‘security’. Despite the long history of the use of this term in policy and scholarly circles alike, this is not a straightforward construct, and security remains a contested concept without a universally accepted definition. The amorphousness and malleability of the concept reflect the complexity of security issues, different contexts of security, and the interests of concerned policy actors. All of these factors are present in the varied understandings and applications of the term ‘economic security’, which involves a host of issues in different security contexts that are of concern to many different actors, for example.

The survival of the referent object concerned provides the foundation for conceptualizations of security (see Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998, 21). The paradigm of realism has
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supplied the fundamental analytical framework for security, and the study of security is best established by considering issues such as national independence, state sovereignty, and territorial integrity in terms of external, state-based, politico-military threats. This commonly is referred to as ‘state’ or ‘national security’, and where security is discussed without further elaboration, this often represents the terms in which it is understood.

While the realist conceptualization of security remains valid and continues to offer an important lens through which to analyze security, it has been subject to a sustained challenge on a number of levels. An increasing number of scholars regard the established perspective as providing too narrow an analytical framework (see Katzenstein and Sil 2004, 1–2). This challenge centers on the state, both as the referent object of security and as the source of threat. This involves approaching security in broader terms, considering threats other than those stemming from hostile states and their impact at levels other than the state. Observers have noted that some states approach security in terms that directly consider the safety and well-being of groups within the state, focusing on the ‘survival, well-being, and dignity’ of people (Caballero-Anthony 2012, 27). Asian states figure prominently in this trend (see Capie and Evans 2007, 65–75). A growing number of scholars also note that the dominant conceptualization of security emerged in the particular context of strong, centralized states. A number of authors highlight the ethnocentric nature of the established understanding of security (see Ayoob 1986, 5; see also Acharya and Buzan 2010, 6–7). The analysis of security in Asian states traditionally reflects an overreliance on Western understandings of what this involves.

Despite the strength of this critique, no alternative approach has entirely supplanted focusing on the security of the state. Instead, we have a situation of competing orthodoxies, which generate their own distinct debates and literatures. The general approach that considers security in a non-state-centric manner has been labeled ‘nontraditional security’ to distinguish it from the established approach, which accordingly now is referred to by its critics as ‘traditional security’. These approaches are referred to in this study as ‘intrastate security’ and ‘state security’, respectively, for the sake of clarity.

The intrastate security approach is characterized by its breadth and depth. It is multidimensional in that it encompasses a range of potential security issues, which largely impact internally and are not necessarily the product of deliberate strategies on the part of hostile state actors. This approach focuses on referent objects of security below the level of the state, though it concerns states as well. The focus may be on society as a whole or on particular groups or even individuals within society, and such ‘societal’ or ‘human security’ concerns may overlap with or be driven by regime security considerations (see Bourne 2014, 12–14; Sheehan 2005, 43–52 for useful discussions of this). This is broadly synonymous with the inclusive approach of ‘comprehensive security’, which embraces the requirements of intrastate security alongside those of state security. Broadening the analytical framework to encompass referent objects of security other than the state and to consider a broader range of security threats involves some dilution of its center of attention, but this does not come at the cost of its substantive focus.

While intrastate and state security overlap, this distinction is important. These focus on different core issues and often generate conflicting policy imperatives, which can prove difficult to harmonize or to pursue in tandem without unduly compromising important policy objectives. Security agendas vary greatly between states, but prioritizing conflicting objectives can prove difficult, forcing political authorities to make difficult policy choices. This distinction thus provides an important lens through which to analyze security issues in Asian states.
The state security approach constitutes a useful point of departure for the analysis of security in Asian states but provides only an incomplete framework as it is essential to consider intrastate issues as well. As is discussed in the section that follows, Asian states differ in important respects from those that have provided the exemplar for the state-centric framework for analyzing security. Concern over state security remains important in Asia, but security is understood and approached in terms that extend beyond the state. It is noteworthy that the Asian region has given rise to innovative thinking on security issues, with its states at the forefront of the comprehensive security trend and Asian scholars prominent in developing analytical frameworks for intrastate security (see Buzan and Hansen 2009, 136; and Capie and Evans 2007, 65–66).

The roots of security in Asian states

Examination of security in Asian states requires an understanding of their historical backgrounds and their domestic and international contexts, both of which continue to exert profound effects on how security is understood and approached. The formative experiences and the domestic contexts of most Asian states are quite distinct from those of the Western states whose examples inform assumptions about state security. The course of political development has been abridged, with most Asian states emerging or re-emerging as independent polities over the course of the post-World War II transformation of the international order, which in Asia saw the end of colonialism. The end of the Cold War constituted another important watershed as the receding influence of non-Asian states provided scope for pre-colonial frameworks of international politics to ‘reassert themselves’, albeit in new forms (Alagappa 1998, 65; see also Job 1992, 13).

The domestic context of most Asian states differs significantly from that of the developed industrial states of Europe and North America. This is a reflection of Asian states’ diversity in ethnic and other terms. Postcolonial Asian states are much more socially heterogeneous as a result of colonial powers’ role in constructing what may be seen as artificial political boundaries in that they do not correspond with any that existed prior to the arrival of the European powers or that might have emerged otherwise, particularly in Southeast Asia. The relatively recent emergence or re-emergence of states with weak social cohesion has resulted in processes of state formation markedly different from those of the ‘European model’ (Ayoob 1986, 4). This is most marked in those Asian states that are ‘weak states’ with poorly developed state capabilities. In Myanmar, for example, central political authority is only loosely exercised over large sections of the country. Many Asian states remain engaged in processes of state-building, having had less opportunity to develop into the strong, cohesive entities that are assumed under the state security paradigm (Friedrichs 2012, 759–60; see also Tavares 2010, 84).

Relatively weak internal cohesion and political institutions generate particular policy demands. Political authorities potentially are confronted by the need not only to ensure internal stability but also to promote or reinforce the legitimacy both of the state and their own worthiness to lead it (Hughes 2004, 24). Concerns such as these may remain salient even as developmental efforts produce results. These factors encourage attention to issues that do not generate similar levels of concern and that are not regarded as security issues elsewhere. These issues are potentially regarded as more pressing in Asian states than state security issues such as sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Even where internal cohesion and political development are not problematic, other factors have produced analogous security perspectives. There are several Asian states where...
domestic and international factors generate sustained attention to intrastate security requirements. In China, enduring concern over regime security encourages the promotion of socioeconomic progress (see Zha 1999, 71–76). In Taiwan, the government’s need to promote ‘human betterment’ and stability, thereby legitimizing the rule of the Republic of China over that of the rival People’s Republic of China, has driven determined efforts to promote and sustain economic progress (see Kuo 1985, 281). It is noteworthy that these concerns survived Taiwan’s post-Cold War democratic transition, demonstrating the scope for regime security concerns to transcend particular political regimes. Japan, for its part, constitutes an exception to the regional norm in that it has had a long history as a unified polity and was never subject to colonial rule, but popular expectations following World War II have served as the foundation for a security agenda that encompasses intrastate security (see Soeya 1998, 206).

The foundations of state security in the region also are quite deep. These are comprised of contested and porous borders, many of which are legacies of the colonial period, disputed maritime boundaries, and interstate politico-military rivalries, some of which are legacies of the Cold War. Interstate rivalries have been strongest in Northeast Asia, but Southeast Asia has seen a number of low-intensity conflicts that have been driven or exacerbated by interstate rivalries. Contested and porous borders are more of an issue in Southeast Asia than Northeast Asia, but disputed maritime boundaries are the subject of growing concern in both subregions. State security issues are far from peripheral features of Asian states’ security agendas as a result, though the relative importance of state and intrastate security varies greatly. As discussed later, the salience of state security issues is rising across the region, but this is unlikely to result in the sidelining of intrastate security concerns in any Asian state.

The drivers of intrastate and state security are mutually reinforcing. State security requirements highlight the importance of and potentially influence approaches to intrastate security as economic disparities and underdeveloped political institutions may generate or exacerbate internal security threats, including by contributing to an environment conducive to the rise of separatist and irredentist movements, with the potential scope for security threats from domestic groups encouraging attention to internal security issues. Where intrastate security is concerned, territorial integrity and the scope for effective governance that comes with stability and sovereignty are highly beneficial.

These features provide the basis for the distinct nature of security in Asian states. This is characterized by complex policy agendas encompassing a broad range of objectives, which can be difficult to reconcile and therefore pursue without some negative impact. Political authorities accordingly often seek to pursue the requirements of intrastate and state security objectives in parallel, relatively independent of one another. This is demonstrated by the region’s asymmetric networks of economic and political relations, which manifest in the development and deepening of economic interdependence between states that regard each other as threats in state security terms, such as China and Taiwan, and China and Japan.

Security in Asia: states and societies

Asian security perspectives are quite complex. The failure to appreciate the extent to which this is the case has contributed to the tendency to apply analytical frameworks developed with other regions in mind when considering security in Asian states. Analyses of this largely rely on the state-centric framework provided by the Western tradition without considering the influence of important features of the local security environment. While insights on the nature of security and how security concerns translate into policy deriving from other
regions are not entirely inapplicable to the study of security in Asian states, these insights can only account for security in Asian states up to a point. Analyses of security in Asian states must take into account the distinct features of security in the region.

There are important differences in security across Asian states, but there are key features that have exhibited considerable continuity over time that define security in Asian states. These help to define what effectively amounts to the Asian security paradigm. Regional understandings of security are characterized by a tendency to approach security in multidimensional and multilevel terms. Security in Asian states is not limited to the security of Asian states and involves issues that elsewhere largely remain unrecognized as security issues. Policy concern over the domestic issues regarded as security issues in Asian states is not unique to them, but elsewhere, such concerns generally remain much more marginal, despite the post-Cold War broadening of the security agenda in many states. This sets security in Asian states apart from that in developed states in regions such as Europe. At the same time, it differs from that of many developing states in terms of the potential clash between the requirements of intrastate and state security. This results from the perceived requirement to pursue economic progress through integration into transnational economic processes.

The key features of security in Asian states

There are a number of key features of security in Asian states. It tends to be approached in much broader terms than in states elsewhere as a result of the factors outlined in the preceding section. These states are characterized by the breadth of their security concerns and the depth of their concern over security issues in terms of the referent objects of security. Both dimensions, which are interrelated, involve noteworthy internal focuses that are distinct from the internal security focus that is a common feature of state security, though this may also be an issue and can overlap considerably if this is the case. The common ground of intrastate and state security is demonstrated by their shared interest of these approaches in internal stability.

The fact that the referent object of security is not limited to the state is the most salient feature of security in Asian states. There is deep concern over the security of groups other than the state across the region, either in terms of the security society as a whole or that of particular intra-societal groups. It has been noted for some time that intrastate security tensions in Asian states can be as great or even greater than interstate tensions (see Chong 2010, 132–33). This is reflected in the range of issues that are considered security issues in Asian states, which is discussed in detail later. Many of these issues directly concern the well-being and expectations of groups within the state.

The focus of security concern may be broad in that political authorities seek to promote the security of multiple groups simultaneously. This is facilitated by the fact that the security requirements of different groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Regime and societal security, for example, may involve distinct elements, but these intersect, and regime and societal security are mutually reinforcing as a result. The focus of concern can shift over time in concert with changes in the domestic and international environments. Many domestic and international trends and developments are beyond the control of state political authorities but may be influenced by states. The domestic environment for security in a number of Asian states has been transformed by their successful pursuit of their intrastate security agendas, as successful economic development has generated higher expectations. Taiwan offers an important example of how the focus of security concern can change over time. In this case, regime security concerns evolved into concern over society as a whole as economic
and political development deepened, so that a strong intrastate security focus survived the
democratic transition, which saw the political opposition supplant the ruling Guomindang in 2000.

Concern over the security of groups within the state is not an adjunct to concern over
the security of the state. It is noteworthy that Asian states value the security of social groups
sufficiently to seek to promote this regardless of the level of concern over state security,
and not merely at those times when there is no perceived immediate state security threat or
heightened interstate tension. This testifies to the strength of concern over the security of
social groups in Asian states. This has yet to be tested by a major interstate military conflict
between Asian states, but it is probable that even in such a case the security of social groups
would remain important.

The state does constitute a key referent object of security alongside social groups. The
key difference in Asian states is that concern over the security of groups within states helps
to mitigate concern over state security by encouraging political authorities to recognize the
positive contribution of other states to their own security. Viewing other states in non-zero-
sum terms helps to counterbalance the position typically associated with concern over state
security. Thus, while state security is very important in Asian states, it is not as dominant as
it typically is elsewhere.

A correspondingly broad range of matters are understood and approached as security
issues in Asian states. Where intrastate security is concerned, this can involve the survival
of the referent object, including the political survival of ruling regimes but more typically
centers around the condition of their existence, such as socioeconomic issues related to their
quality of life or the circumstances within which they function. This often takes the form of
a focus on specific facets of human or societal security ranging from income levels to access
to education to health issues, including adequate food, water, and health care, that political
authorities can demonstrate their ‘performance legitimacy’ by addressing. Concern generally
is not limited to one or even a few of these facets, with the particular focus of Asian political
authorities varying considerably. One common feature is the level of concern over economic
security, which is widely regarded as crucial to a host of facets of intrastate security (see
Nesadurai 2006, 7). This involves considering economic security issues in a context divorced
from the focus on the economic basis of defense encouraged by state security.

Not only is it the case that a broad range of issues potentially constitute security issues,
but the perspective involved in Asian states is distinct. It is considered crucial to contribute as
much as possible to the security of the group or groups that are the focus of security concern.
This is most readily apparent in terms of economic progress. This is important to intrastate
security by virtue of its capacity to supply the resources necessary for political authorities to
provide for the security of social groups, but this is not simply a matter of effecting economic
progress. It is just as important that the benefits of economic progress extend as far as possi-
ble, with the intention of minimizing, if not reducing, intra-societal economic disparities.
Such an approach has shaped the economic strategies of a number of emerging industrial
states in Northeast and Southeast Asia, which have successfully delivered general improve-
ments in living standards alongside sustained economic progress.

The importance attached to intrastate security concerns has enabled Asian states to make
an important contribution to our understanding of security. Asian states have broken new
ground in how intrastate security is conceptualized as a result of their explicit engagement
of the issues concerned as security issues. Approaching issues in this manner encourages
consideration of the specific requirements involved and how they can best be attained in the
context of the broader security agenda. Asian states are notable for considering intrastate

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and state security alongside one another. Such a ‘comprehensive’ perspective on security first emerged in Asia and remains strongly associated with this region (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 136).

Asian states have played a similar role where the concept of ‘resilience’ is concerned. Resilience concerns the capacity of societies, institutions, or states to survive shocks of a political, economic, social, environmental, or military nature. Crucially, security threats may stem from deliberate conventional or nonconventional acts on the part of other state or non-state actors, relatively autonomous systemic economic processes, or natural disasters. Even where security threats are understood to arise externally, the focus is on their impact within states, thus demonstrating the intrastate security roots of the concept. Concern over resilience first arose in Asia more than four decades ago (see Soehartono 1974). Attention to the issue of resilience stems from the policy approach encouraged by Asian states’ concern over intrastate security issues, which entails considerable vulnerability to trends and developments arising externally.

Attention to intrastate security in Asian states has come at the expense of state security in the sense that this has served to divert some attention from state security issues, but this involves supplementing rather than supplanting concern over state security. Concern over state security issues is evident across the region. The form that concern over state security takes is conventional, with attention to issues such as the integrity of national borders and national sovereignty common to Asian states. Many of the issues driving concern over intrastate security in Asian states reflect colonial legacies in that they derive from or have been exacerbated by colonial-era developments. Many international borders and maritime boundaries in the region can be disputed due to their colonial origin, for example. This includes those in the South China Sea (Raine and Le Mière 2013, 36–38). The same is true of the legitimacy of states whose existence reflects the influence of a colonial power. In some cases, state security concerns involve entrenched interstate rivalries, some of which, notably those of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and China and Taiwan, represent residual conflicts from the Cold War.

The importance of state security is demonstrated by the level of attention accorded to the issues involved. Political authorities in Asian states devote considerable resources to national defense and press their territorial and maritime boundary claims with some determination. This can be seen in the perennial conflict over the South China Sea, where a number of Asian states have overlapping, conflicting claims, and in the East China Sea, where a number of features are disputed by littoral states. The region also has seen open military conflict. During the Cold War, many interstate conflicts were externally driven, but this no longer is the case. Post-Cold War Asian conflicts largely have been low intensity in nature, but there is a strong potential for major conflicts, particularly on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait.

The relative importance of intrastate and state security varies between states and there is not necessarily a stable balance between them, with a number of Asian states demonstrating the capacity for security priorities to shift considerably over time. It is noteworthy that a strong focus on intrastate security remains a feature of security in Asian states despite the persistence of interstate tensions and the potential for conflict in the region. This is despite numerous unresolved border and maritime boundary issues, many of which are likely to prove enduring given their complexity and the stakes involved. This contrasts with the much stronger focus on state security elsewhere. The importance attached to intrastate and state security renders establishing a clear hierarchy of security concerns a complex and difficult prospect. This is borne out by the fact that there is no clear subordination of one to the other.
in any Asian state. This is facilitated by the fact that they can be mutually supporting; trans-
national economic ties conducive to the pursuit of many intrastate security objectives are
greatly facilitated in a stable regional security environment, for example.

In discussing security in Asian states there is an important general distinction to be made
between Northeast and Southeast Asian states. Their dynamics have tended to differ in that
Northeast Asian states have demonstrated significantly stronger concern over state security,
though this has not resulted in neglect of the requirements of intrastate security. This divide
is reflected in substantial differences in defense establishments; those of most Southeast Asian
states are underdeveloped compared to the states of Northeast Asia, being organized and
equipped more for counterinsurgency than for conventional operations against other states.
This distinction gradually is eroding, however, as discussed later.

**Security policy in Asian states**

Security policy in Asian states stands out in terms of its focus and its approach. Both the
breadth and the pattern of security policy in these states strongly reflect the distinct nature of
their security perspectives. Asian states’ policy agendas generally encompass a diverse range
of objectives and often involve areas that do not generally figure as the province of security
policy elsewhere.

Security policy in Asian states is orthodox enough where state security is concerned. In
all Asian states, there is considerable attention to the requirements of national defense, which
in some cases reflects concern over external threats of an existential nature. State security
concerns drive measures designed to secure borders and exclusive economic zones, and to
support national sovereignty. It is noteworthy that where state security is concerned, there is
a marked preference for dealing with other states bilaterally, even in crisis situations.

State security policy in Asian states often does stand out in having a greater internal focus
than that in developed industrial states. Southeast Asian states in particular have been dis-
tinguished by the extent of their internal security focus. States such as Indonesia, Laos, and
the Philippines traditionally have devoted far greater attention to internal security threats
from domestic insurgent movements than threats posed by other states. A number of these
states are preoccupied with establishing effective control over their national territory. This
has driven the development of defense establishments with internal threats in mind. These
are far better geared to the requirements of counterinsurgency operations than conventional
military operations against foreign states. This is changing only gradually, as is discussed
later.

It is the focus on intrastate security that most distinguishes security policy in Asian states.
The intrastate security requirements of Asian states generate sustained attention to develop-
ment, particularly in economic terms, which is widely regarded as providing the means
of addressing a broad range of security concerns. The importance of economic security in
this sense is manifest in the extent to which many Asian states’ developmental strategies are
geard to intrastate security requirements (see Hu 2004, 277).

The manner in which political authorities in Asian states approach economic security is
significant. The importance attached to ensuring that the benefits of economic progress and
development are as widely distributed as possible ensures that strong support for economic
development often is accompanied by efforts to ensure the relatively equitable distribution
of the benefits of economic progress across society. This has contributed to the relatively
extensive state role in many areas of commercial and public life in Asian states, with politi-
cal authorities seeking to directly govern or indirectly influence a broad range of activities.
The arrangements involved can be developed collaboratively with relevant stakeholders and can involve the provision of incentives by the state, or the state can adopt a highly intrusive role and exercise some degree of coercion. Newly independent Malaysia implemented highly interventionist economic and social programs in the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to meet popular expectations, for example (Stubbs 2005, 117–18). In most cases, however, the state does not dominate the economic landscape.

The policy approach generated by the intrastate security agendas of Asian states carries with it its own hazards. The objectives concerned are to some extent subjective and popular expectations tend to rise over time in concert with improving socioeconomic conditions. This drives political authorities across the region to pursue economic progress through deep integration into the transnational processes of the global economy, where the prospects for economic progress and development are widely regarded as much more promising. This is true even of China following the pivotal policy shift of the late 1970s that ushered in ‘market socialism’. This perspective is reinforced by the successes of the region’s export-oriented emerging industrial states, such as Singapore and South Korea, not to mention Japan at an earlier point in time, which followed such a path. The popularity of this developmental approach was not undermined by the Asian economic crisis of 1997–98 or the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–09. The importance attached to this approach is demonstrated by the willingness to accept asymmetric yet mutually advantageous economic relations. As promising as this policy approach is, it entails a high degree of vulnerability as it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to insulate the domestic economy from the effects of economic trends and developments arising externally. In this the policy requirements of intrastate and state security conflict. In no case is the tension between them more acute than Taiwan. Political authorities there have struggled to shape the cross-Strait economic relationship so that it contributes to the security of the people of Taiwan, without undermining state security (see Chen 2012, 52–56). More porous international boundaries also are problematic from the perspective of resilience, which encourages efforts to minimize the consequences of shocks.

The hybrid nature of Asian states’ security agendas complicates their pursuit of security. While there is considerable scope for overlap, particularly in terms of economic security where knowledge-based high-technology industry-based economic development potentially meets both state and intrastate security requirements, the scope for conflict between them is just as considerable. This particularly is the case where the imperatives of economic development and progress encourage economic engagement of states that figure as actual or potential international political rivals, where it can be difficult to support intrastate or state security without compromising the other. This produces a security dilemma of sorts, as measures taken with one in mind may well undermine the other.

The importance of security requirements that conflict encourages their prioritization by concerned political authorities, but developing a hierarchy of objectives is far from a straightforward exercise in practice. The difficulties involved can be seen in the flexibility of the relative weighting of state and intrastate security objectives. Political authorities in many Asian states have sought to circumvent this problem by compartmentalization, pursuing state and non-state security relatively independently of each other. This has been manifest in the contrasting and asymmetric patterns of regional economic and political relations that have characterized the post–World War II regional political and economic landscape. This is demonstrated by economic policy, which often involves developing economic ties to states that are political rivals. In Japan, this separation of business and politics is termed seikei bunri (Custy and Van Wyk 1994, 64). This translates into a policy approach that seeks to reduce rather than prevent vulnerability. Political authorities in Asian states pursue economic
relationships involving competition alongside collaboration, however uneasy, in developing interstate economic mechanisms at the structural level. This state of affairs is only possible due to the common economic ground provided by the converging developmental interests of Asian states.

While security policy in Asian states is less state-centric than elsewhere, states play a central role in addressing security challenges. Political authorities generally adopt a proactive approach to promoting security and largely pursue this on the basis of national efforts, albeit through engagement of economic processes that transcend national boundaries where intrastate security is concerned (see Hoadley 2006, 17–18). The national approach of security policy is even more marked where state security is concerned, as is discussed later.

The requirements of intrastate security are reflected in the range of policy actors that contribute to states’ security programs. The complex security imperatives of Asian states encourage holistic whole-of-government if not whole-of-society approaches to security (see, for example, Hong 2003, 55–56). Security policy communities tend to be comparatively fragmented as a result, with facets of policy often the responsibility of a varied assortment of actors. This also encourages engagement of non-state actors. This practice is best developed in the pursuit of economic progress and development. Political authorities in many Asian states seek to influence, if not collaborate with, local industry, supporting it in their common drive for economic success. China was a late convert to this position, but the size and significance of its non-state sector has grown since the late 1970s, and China’s leaders are embracing the liberal international economic order.

The common ground of security and security collaboration

The nature of security in Asian states and the perceived requirements of the pursuit of security have a significant impact on the regional security landscape. This demonstrates the importance attached to intrastate as well as state security and testifies to the complexity of pursuing them concurrently, as political authorities seek to pursue them relatively independently of each other. The distinct requirements of intrastate and state security are manifest in how Asian states engage each other. In most Asian states, international security policy is characterized by a marked disjunction between how these security objectives are pursued, producing a very uneven mosaic of arrangements; some arrangements integrate states across the region while others are more restricted in scope, such as those developed under the aegis of subregional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The importance of economic engagement serves as a constraint on political authorities, who must be careful to avoid impacting negatively on their own intrastate security objectives. It is noteworthy that there is a general reluctance to exploit economic relations for political gain in the region. Thus, while the region has witnessed uneven patterns of interstate economic engagement and even rival initiatives, such as the American-led Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative, the waging of ‘economic warfare’ is rare in Asia.
This state of affairs contrasts sharply with that where state security is concerned. The region is much less formally ordered where state security is concerned, with interstate security institutions decidedly underdeveloped compared to those that structure the economic landscape. Such progress as has occurred has been laborious and very gradual (see, for example, Moss 2012, 30–32; see also Chong 2010, 133). While a less restrained approach to security mechanisms now is evident, political authorities in the region continue to demonstrate a marked reluctance to move beyond symbolic interstate meetings and summits, despite issues that demand attention and calls for collaboration on security issues. The reluctance to address state security issues multilaterally or even bilaterally produce a regional security landscape very different from that of Europe.

The study of Asian security and security policy

A brief note about the study of security in Asian states is in order. Scholarly analysis has tended to follow rather than anticipate security and security policy in Asian states. The nature of security in Asian states remains poorly reflected in the scholarly literature in that the relevant literature remains dominated by case- or issue-specific studies, as invaluable as these are in their respective areas. The literatures focusing on intrastate aspects of security and economic security literatures are particularly rich (see, for example, Pempel 2013; Burke and McDonald 2007). That examining Asia’s broader security landscape is less effective at capturing the complexity of regional security trends. This is despite early recognition of the distinct nature of security and valuable studies of particular facets of security in Asian states. Recognition of the importance of examining security in Asian states in its own terms has developed in tandem with the general movement to reconsider the nature of security, particularly in non-Western contexts. Natasha Hamilton-Hart’s critique of the ‘narrow’ focus of studies of security in East Asia remains valid, however (Hamilton-Hart 2009, 49–50).

The future of security in Asia: a changing of the guard?

Trends in the region are producing a complex new security environment. The gaps between understandings and approaches to security in Northeast and Southeast Asia and between Asian and other states are narrowing. Recent decades have seen an important shift in security in Asia, with increasing concern over state security evident across the region. In some cases, this reflects a growing sense of insecurity produced by particular rivals. The perceived military threat posed by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is helping to focus attention on state security in a number of states, for example. This trend is most marked on the part of Southeast Asian states, but it is noteworthy that there is heightened attention even in states that traditionally have exhibited greater concern over state security. This is driving defense capability development efforts in Northeast and Southeast Asian states alike, changing patterns of defense development in Southeast Asia in the process. This is narrowing the gap between Southeast and Northeast Asian states and contributing to the long-standing debate over whether or not Asia is experiencing a conventional ‘arms race’ (see Acharya 2013, 9–10; Bitzinger 2010). A return to a more multipolar regional order, which seems to be in the offing, would further reinforce this trend.

This has the potential to effect a structural transformation of the Asian security landscape, by producing a regional security environment that is far less conducive to the parallel pursuit of intrastate and state security. This would render efforts by political authorities in Asian
states to pursue their intrastate and state security objectives independently of each other an increasingly difficult exercise. The eroding boundary between economics and politics has significant implications for the pursuit of both intrastate and state security in Asian states.

The transformation of security in Asian states will broaden the extent of overlap with security trends and developments in other regions. Security in Asian states never has been completely free from extra-regional influence, but in recent decades, this influence has been muted. There was a Cold War in Asia, but this took a different form and was with notable exceptions less severe than in Europe. The extent to which Asian security trends and developments reflect those elsewhere is likely to increase due to the transformation of security in Asian states, as is the extent to which this transformation is likely to impact outside the region.

A final note on security in Asian states is in order. Asian states are entering uncharted territory where security is concerned. Security in Asian states likely will remain distinct from that of states in other regions for the foreseeable future due to the importance attached to intrastate security requirements and the particular terms in which these are pursued. This is despite the narrowing divide, which has seen increasing concern over state security in Asian states alongside a heightened sense of the importance of intrastate security in regions such as Europe and North America, which have seen an Asian influence in terms of comprehensive approaches to security. This is exemplified by the concept of resilience, which found broader acceptance elsewhere, entering the security vocabulary of the United States and other Western states following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Security in Asian states reflects local understandings and concerns; external actors continue to influence security developments in the region but not security trends. How issues such as human security are understood and approached in Asian states differs from states elsewhere in important respects, for example (see Acharya 2001, 444–51).

Concluding remarks

While distinct national features ensure that there is no single regional tradition of security, there are characteristic patterns that define what is usefully conceptualized as an Asian model of security. The complexity of security in Asian states necessitates considering a relatively broad range of factors, potentially involving multiple levels of enquiry, in analyzing security trends and developments. The Asian security paradigm is unlikely to prove transitory, as the features that have shaped security in Asian states, many of which are products of the colonial era and to a lesser extent the Cold War, are likely to prove enduring. Asian states will continue to influence as well as challenge the conventional wisdom on security, and will provide an important point of reference for analyzing security policy in cases where security agendas encompass intrastate as well as state security.

Bibliography


