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New Asian Disorder

Rivalries Embroiling the Pacific Century

Edited by Lowell Dittmer

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Disorder under Heaven

Lowell Dittmer¹

All under heaven is in chaos. The situation is excellent.

—Mao Zedong, as quoted by Zhou Enlai, July 1971

The twenty-first century has been forecast to become the Asian century, and its performance in the last half of the twentieth attests that this was no idle daydream.² To be sure, Asia is a latecomer, emerging post war from colonialism, followed by communist insurgencies, and still by the late 1960s the poorest continent in the world—the pessimism voiced by Gunnar Myrdal in his famous 1968 tome *Asian Drama* was then widespread.³ But by 2016, Asia accounted for 33.84 percent of world GDP (up from 26 percent in 2000) and over one-third of world trade. Based on high savings and investment, a literate tradition reinforced by strong commitment to education, smart state industrial policies, and export-oriented growth, the East Asian economies have consistently outpaced global GDP growth. And, despite being hit by a disruptive trade war and a global pandemic, Asia is expected to continue to thrive. China is now the world's second-largest economy (and soon no doubt the first), competing with the US on all fronts—economic, technological, and

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1. We are all grateful to the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, for sponsoring a conference in the spring of 2019, at which preliminary drafts of these chapters were first presented, as well as to the four anonymous reviewers for their careful analyses and valuable criticisms of each of the chapters.
 2. Asian Development Bank, *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century* (Metro Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2011); Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Flow of Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008); Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian: Commerce, Conflict and Culture in the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019); John West, *Asian Century on a Knife-Edge: A 360-Degree Analysis of Asia's Recent Economic Development* (Singapore: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018), among others.
 3. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1968), vols. I, II, and III.

geopolitical.⁴ Southeast Asia, with a population of some 650 million, is just behind India, with a GDP of some \$2 trillion. Asia has always been the world's largest continent and now has more than half its population, which will likely continue to grow for the next fifty years, from four to five billion from 2000 to 2050.

Although Asia is still poorer than the rest of the world (per capita GDP about \$5,800), it is growing faster. Asia raised hundreds of millions from poverty over the past five decades; merchants look forward to an Asian middle class of 1.75 billion by 2020, surpassing the West's (defined by number of households with per capita incomes of \$10,000, at 2005 purchasing power parity/PPP). By 2050, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates, three billion Asians may have living standards similar to those of Europeans and contribute half of global GDP. As Asia grows richer, it also becomes more integrated. While the rest of the world ensnarls itself in nationalist trade wars, Asia continues to interlink its economies via trade, investment, and tourism. Intra-Asian trade nearly doubled as a proportion of total Asian trade between 1955 and 2005. Scorned by Trump, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (now known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP) was revived under Japanese leadership and came into force at the start of 2019. The world's largest trade pact, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), was signed in November 2020 (despite India's withdrawal). In the realm of ideas, China boasts a new, non-Western path to modernization; as Xi Jinping put it in 2017, China "offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence." Not all have opted to follow it, but all Asian emerging economies share a neo-mercantilist developmental pathway emphasizing state industrial policy and export-oriented growth, which has proved remarkably successful for seventy years.

But this coin has two sides. The emergent counter-narrative to the "Asian century" has taken two forms, too often conflated. The first is that the rise is illusory, exaggerated, or has run out of steam.⁵ The export-oriented growth model has, along with globalization, reached its expiration point—Japan's lost decade is the new normal. The Asian tigers' recovery from the Asian financial crisis has plateaued, and China's economic model is on a slow glide path toward the slower growth rate of a large industrial economy. Japan underwent a demographic transition decades ago, and China is now following suit, getting old before it gets rich. Over 20 percent of Asians will be elderly by 2050. The global financial crisis (GFC) that erupted in 2008 was overcome by piling on debt, and since then no major economy has cut its leverage, while the biggest two—China and the US—have increased it. China's debt overhang

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4. "China," "the Chinese Mainland," and "People's Republic of China" are used interchangeably throughout.
 5. For example, Michael Auslin, *The End of the Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

(now over 300 percent of GDP) has become a drag on GDP growth. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has provided generous infrastructure support to many less developed countries.⁶ But can China afford it? Li Keqiang revealed in a May 2020 press conference that some 600 million Chinese were still earning less than five dollars a day.⁷ Trump's "trade war" and the 2020 coronavirus epidemic are the final nails in the coffin. As regional growth locomotive, China's slowdown will take the region down with it.

The second counterargument is that while Asia's rise has been real enough, the prospect of a smooth, "win-win" East-West functional integration has fallen asunder.⁸ China's shift to a mixed market-planned industrialization strategy succeeded in building the world's largest manufacturing and exporting powerhouse, but it then turned against the liberal framework in which the market had been nested, both domestically and abroad.⁹ High-tech electronic surveillance and censorship, repression of dissent, coercive resocialization of Uyghurs and other religious minorities, assertive territorial claims in the near abroad, the premature withdrawal of Hong Kong's promised autonomy—the bloom is off the rose. With China's tacit support, much of Southeast Asia has also undergone a "democratic recession."¹⁰ Upset by populists like Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra, fragile steps toward liberal democracy often retreat to a securitized "hybrid democracy," as in Myanmar under the joint rule of Aung San Suu Kyi and the Tatmadaw, Thailand under a military-royalty

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6. Take Pakistan, for example. Before 2017, Pakistan's largest infrastructure investment was a \$382 million project funded by a loan from the World Bank to develop a bus rapid transit system in the port city of Karachi. In comparison the BRI in Pakistan, termed the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), promised to bring in investments of \$62 billion over a ten-year period. Though it now seems unlikely the project will meet those transformative expectations, with ca. \$25 billion invested by early 2020, it has already achieved a great deal (the energy package alone should add at least 14,000 MW to the national grid). See "Asian Development Bank to Support Bus Rapid Transit System in Pakistan," *World Construction Network*, July 8, 2019, accessed at worldconstructionnetwork.com/news.
 7. Reported by Caixin Global, June 6, 2020, accessed at <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-06-06/opinion-china-has-600-million-people-with-monthly-income-less-than-141-is-that-true-101564071.html>.
 8. After his early enthusiasm with Chimerica, Niall Ferguson adopted this more pessimistic perspective; see for example his Orient Express chapter in *The War of the World: 20th Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); see also Stein Ringen, *The Perfect Dictatorship: China in the 21st Century* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong press, 2016); T. J. Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and US Policy toward East Asia," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 81–126.
 9. See Xu Jilin, "Liweitian de youhun: 2000 nian laide guojia sichao pipan" [The Leviathan specter: A critique of 2000 years of Chinese statism], in *Sixiang*, ed. Qian Yongxiang (Taipei: Taiwan Jianjing chubanshe, 2011, no. 12); www1.guancha.cn/XuJiLin/2011_07_10_60973.shtm; see also "Document 9," as translated in ChinaFile, November 8, 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>
 10. Cf. Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (January 2015): 141–55; and Francis Fukuyama, "30 Years of World Politics: What Has Changed?" *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (January 2020): 11–21. Even hybrid democracies fall well short of the seamless dictatorship to which the Xi regime seems to aspire.

duopoly, the Philippines under Duterte, or the one-party states of Hun Sen in Cambodia, Singapore under the Lees, or Bangladesh under Sheik Hasina's Awami League. And to say Asia is politically fragmented is an understatement: China wants to devour Taiwan; North Korea wants to swallow South Korea; the Koreans hate the Japanese; China has territorial disputes with India, Japan, and several Southeast Asian states; and there are disputes between Cambodia and Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, Japan and Russia, Japan and Korea. To cap it all off, bipolarity has returned in the form of the trade dispute between China and the US.¹¹ In China's view, America's insistence on retaining its "leading role" in the region exacerbates all other disputes. At the least, polarization seems apt to result in scrambling supply chains, forcing an unwelcome choice between economic and political security.

Neither of these Manichaeic scenarios is inevitable, yet neither is all wrong. The truth is more complicated, and the purpose of this book is to help make sense of it. But first, what do we mean by "disorder"? What is the nature of the order being disordered?

The Cold War Order

The nature of international order has been a perpetual puzzle to international theorists and practitioners, given the lack of a supreme authority capable of enforcing it. Kissinger dates the collapse of such authority and the birth of the new order to the incredibly sanguinary Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia that ended it. Therewith ended the pretensions of the Holy Roman Empire to universal sovereignty, conferring sovereignty to competing secular nation-states. Westphalian principles—national sovereignty, territorial integrity, legal equality of all states (large or small), noninterference in internal affairs—were then transmitted throughout the world, eventually to be taken up by emerging nation-states to divest themselves of European imperialism.¹² Since that time there have been two forms of order: *defined* order, which, absent any supreme authority, rests on consensual agreement among states as set forth in a treaty, compact, or other international accord; and *emergent* order, which arises from the pattern of interaction among states, typically forming some form of geostrategic power balance.

In collaboration with the victorious allies (primarily Great Britain, in the Atlantic Charter), a relatively undamaged and economically preponderant America created many of the rules of the modern world order and

11. See Oystein Tunsjo, *The Return of Bipolarity to World Politics: China, the United States, and Geostrategic Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

12. See Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*; see also G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crisis of Global Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020); and Bertrand Badie, *New Perspectives on the International Order: No Longer Alone in This World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

implementing institutions in the wake of World War II; i.e., the ideals of open markets and free trade in the economic realm, territorial integrity and national self-determination in the security order. The institutional rulebook was set forth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Marshall Plan, and the United Nations (UN). These rules, however, applied only to the “free” world, specifically the forty-four nations attending the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference. In the ensuing Cold War the Soviet Bloc countries remained a relatively powerless minority in the UN but adopted their own set of rules and institutions to govern “socialist” finance and security, the Committee on Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the Warsaw Pact Organization (WPO) respectively. China joined neither, bound to the Bloc only by a soon fraying bilateral security alliance with the Soviet Union.

The Asian region entered late into the global order and at a decided disadvantage. Technologically behind, most of Asia had fallen under the sway of nineteenth-century European imperialism (or what the Chinese in their case called “semi-imperialism”), from which it emerged only after the Imperial Japanese bid for hegemony was repulsed in 1945. They were then absorbed into the Westphalian state system, abandoning memories of “all-under-heaven” imperial traditions except occasionally to burnish nationalist credentials. But aside from persisting national, linguistic, and cultural differences, within a few years of the Japanese withdrawal the region was swept by communist “national liberation wars.” Hence the Cold War security apparatus erected in the West was quickly replicated in Asia, replete with “bamboo curtain” and divided nations, creating two distinct and self-sufficient socio-economic systems.

Yet there were also important differences between Western and Asian orders. While Europe saw the establishment of two relatively stable multinational defense alliances (NATO in the West, WPO in the East), Asia was too diverse for a SEATO, so Washington established separate bilateral alliances with Japan, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia.¹³ Moscow supported the establishment of communist governments in China, North Vietnam, and eventually Vietnam. The communist order, however, soon disintegrated: China split sharply with the Soviet Union after the first decade of their thirty-year alliance (remaining, however, firmly anti-capitalist for the next two), while Pyongyang and Hanoi balanced between Beijing and Moscow. Finally, perhaps due to its greater diversity, the Cold War ended earlier and more ambiguously than in the West. The Sino-Soviet dispute so direly threatened China’s security that it invited Richard Nixon to Beijing in February 1972, precipitating a major shift in the global power balance. In return for a promised reduction of Chinese support for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV),

13. See Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 575–607.

China got implicit protection from a preemptive Soviet strike on its nascent nuclear capability. A seismic shift indeed, but narrowly limited to the security domain—China maintained its Marxist-Leninist ideology, its command economy, and continued to rail and plot against the “hegemony” of the two superpowers.¹⁴ Not until the rise of Deng Xiaoping at the famous 3rd Plenum of the 11th Party Congress in December 1978 did China begin a more comprehensive reorientation of its economic system and foreign policy.

Order after the Cold War

Only after the Cold War did globalization get underway on a truly global scale, characterized by the emergence of transnational corporations, floating exchange rates, megaregional trade agreements, and transnational supply chains. America again played a lynchpin role, but China was not left out—indeed Washington was eager to elicit China’s integration as “responsible stakeholder” in the new international order. China took Taiwan’s seat on the Security Council (and the General Assembly) of the UN in 1971. It waited to join the World Bank and the IMF until 1980, after such affiliations became compatible with Deng Xiaoping’s new line of “reform and opening up.” China also joined in negotiating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) at its outset in 1982 and ratified the convention in 1996. Joining such Western-based institutions posed an implicit dilemma: too little participation and China was a free rider; too much fed suspicion of a hostile takeover. China certainly benefited from participation, for example as the world’s leading recipient for many years of subsidized World Bank loans. But at first it was little more than a free rider: China’s representatives diligently attended but remained reticent, anticipating Deng’s advice to “hide your light and bide your time” (*taoguang yanghui*). Only gradually, as China grew its economy and became more involved in world trade, did it become more interested in running international governmental organizations (IGOs).

Its first performance became engaged in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which embarrassed Beijing in the 1990 with a critique of its 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. From 1990 to 2005, Chinese diplomats managed to defeat twelve UNHRC resolutions critical of the country’s human rights record, in part by providing discreet economic incentives to developing country swing states. Since reentering in 2013 (now a reorganized council, the UNHRC) China advocated “economic, social, and cultural rights” within the limits of national sovereignty and non-interference. In China’s view, the most fundamental human right is collective “development,” superseding liberal

14. For example, Michael J. Berlin, “China Assails Soviets, U.S. in U.N. Speech,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 1984, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/09/27/china-assails-soviets-us-in-un-speech/a4e2e7fe-1014-42bd-a57f-52ea4ea50e72/>.

rights of individual expression (the US left the council in 2019).¹⁵ China otherwise played a relatively passive role on the commission in these early years. As its economy grew, China successfully demanded more influence not only in the UN (where they now chair four of the fifteen specialized agencies)¹⁶ but in the more consequential Bretton Woods organizations. Since the 1990s China has become a member of almost all important IGOs. It now has the third largest voting share in both the IMF and the World Bank, after the US and Japan. In the IMF, China proposed replacing the dollar as the international reserve currency. This was unsuccessful, but in October 2016 it got the renminbi included as the fifth currency in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket (weighted third after the dollar and the euro), the first currency to be added without being fully exchangeable. It entered the WTO in December 2001, after an arduous accession procedure, quickly taking advantage of its membership to vastly increase exports.

Impatient with a slow climb up the hierarchical pecking order of extant IGOs, China since 2000 also became an IGO entrepreneur, especially among emerging nations. China joined the Group of 20 in 1999, co-founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, joined the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in 2006, and founded the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015, not to mention of course founding and leading the visionary BRI. Although China has tended to focus on economic development in its IGO affiliations, it has recently also included security, as in its active involvement in the Conference on International Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-plus), or the Shangri-La Dialogue forum.

Over the next three decades China reoriented its political economic system in a more pragmatic direction. After considerable debate, it adopted elements of market capitalism domestically, including limited private property, equity, and labor markets. It then cautiously opened its market to the world (initially only in Special Economic Zones, gradually expanding to the entire east coast and beyond). In the past few years it has been argued that the Chinese reform experience was a superficial or even deceitful "hide and bide" strategy, but that would be an oversimplification. While it is certainly true that the most

15. See Ann Kent, *China, the United Nations, and Human Rights: The Limits of Compliance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). While international human rights norms have had little effect on domestic policy, China has been extraordinarily sensitive to criticism on human rights grounds ever since Tiananmen, particularly in the wake of disclosure of its blanket "counterterrorism, deradicalization vocational training policies" (including barbed-wire enclosed internment camps) toward China's Muslim minorities. And it has been remarkably successful at soliciting international support: when twenty-two countries sent a letter to the UNHRC in 2019 criticizing Xi's "comprehensive security" framework, thirty-seven countries wrote a letter defending it.

16. That is to say, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Telecommunications Agency, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and the International Industrial Development Organization.

ambitious reforms were always economic, which offered an immediate tangible payoff, there were also cautious forays into political reform as well, reaching perhaps a zenith at the 13th Party Congress in 1987, where Zhao Ziyang detached the party from the government and launched an independent civil service, explaining that China was still at “a primary stage of socialism” that might last one hundred years.¹⁷ True, reform then hit a giant roadblock with the Tiananmen demonstrations and subsequent crackdown in 1989 but was revived by Deng Xiaoping in his “southern tour” (*nanxun*) speeches three years later and given an international stamp of approval via China’s admission to the WTO in December 2001. In the following decade, China’s GDP growth surpassed 10 percent, based primarily on export-oriented growth.

Thus, although the People’s Republic was not “present at the creation” of the liberal rules-based order in the late 1940s, it was certainly included in the post-Cold War “new world order,” where it has played an increasingly influential role. Even after the Tiananmen crackdown, which did result in international sanctions, most of these did not last long. So to claim that China has been excluded from the rules-based international order would not be correct. China has been an increasingly active participant in the emerging Asian order, and a highly successful one at that, profiting perhaps more than any other nation from globalization. China is now the second largest contributor to funding UN peacekeeping operations, the third largest contributor to the UN, and contributes more personnel to peacekeeping organizations than does any other permanent member of the Security Council.

During the first three post-Cold War decades, we can perceive a slow but sustained movement toward a rules-based order in East Asia. The rules of this order consisted of a consensually constructed version of Westphalian conventions, including the rule of law, national sovereignty, national self-determination, democratic reform, noninterference in internal affairs, respect for ideological differences, open markets, and a renunciation of the use of force to resolve international disputes. These rules were spelled out in a series of mission statements and joint visions at the end of the Cold War, when the collapse of the Iron Curtain made manifest the need for a new regional architecture, such as ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). And for some time, regional peace and cooperation held sway despite initial skepticism about inclusion of authoritarian states which had previously supported divergent agendas. The two communist states in Southeast Asia’s northern tier, Vietnam and Laos, joined ASEAN in 2005 and 2007 respectively (Myanmar also in 2007) after making democratic pledges.

China, having been ostracized after Tiananmen and almost alone in the world after the wholesale collapse of European communism, launched a “charm campaign” to reassure its Asian neighbors and gain inclusion in the

17. See Lowell Dittmer, “Three Visions of Chinese Political Reform,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 38, no. 4–5 (December 2003): 347–76.

new order. It signed ASEAN's Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in 1992, was the first non-ASEAN signatory of TAC in 1993, was included as a "dialogue partner" in 1996, helped set up the ASEAN plus three (APT) forum in 1997, and negotiated the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2000, then the largest multilateral free-trade agreement in the world. For ideological reassurance, China also signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1997 and 1998 respectively, ratifying only the former, however, and accurately translating neither for domestic consumption. The PRC's leading slogans during this period were "peaceful rise/development" and "harmonious world," and China's foreign policies were not noticeably inconsistent. Meanwhile, America remained benignly sidelined from East Asia after its withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, while Russia was internally preoccupied with a difficult transition from communism. Albeit a "strategic vacuum," the region prospered without great power involvement.

Disorder

As Ikenberry notes, the "new world order" that arose in the wake of the Cold War was wider but shallower than its antecedent.¹⁸ Its new members, no longer united by a common threat, did not share the same cultural heritage and were less wholeheartedly committed to it. The surviving communist states—in Asia, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea—now found it practically expedient to engage the world market but remained ideologically committed to a diverging long-term trajectory. The ideologically tolerant liberal community gamely accepted this, initially purely on security grounds (to counter the greater perceived threat from the Soviet Union), and later because it seemed too economically lucrative an opportunity to pass up. But this difference increasingly manifested itself when China became strong enough to insist on its own values and rules, thereby opening what Rozman calls an "identity gap."¹⁹

The liberal rules-based regional order did not derail in a sudden train wreck but gradually lost momentum. Certainly there were some very basic structural and ideological differences to digest after the incomplete end to the Cold War, but the Asian order was an open-ended one, giving even greater leeway to national sovereignty than did the Westphalian order. The primary

18. Ikenberry, *A World Safe*, 258.

19. Gilbert Rozman, *National Identities and Bilateral Relations: Widening Gaps in East Asia and Chinese Demonization of the United States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

China in the Rise and Fall of the “New World Order”

Toward New Inter-imperial Rivalry

Ho-fung Hung

Introduction

Globalism and democracy are now in retreat amid the rise of right-wing populism across the globe. Recent discussions lamenting the retreat of globalization and democracy treat both as a natural process, neglecting the historical origins of the recent rise of globalization-democratization as a political project and its internal contradictions since its inception.

In this chapter, I trace the origins of the globalization- and democratization-promotion projects that the United States has undertaken since the Reagan administration. I argue that these twin projects can be traced to the profitability crisis of capitalism among advanced capitalist states, as well as the crisis of US hegemony in the 1970s. These crises motivated the US state to open new markets for US capital exports as a way to revive profits by taming domestic organized labor. In the meantime, the US started the democracy-promotion project, with the intended or unintended consequence of neutralizing the protectionist resistance of authoritarian states, including America’s own Cold War allies in the developing world.

After the end of Cold War, this globalization-democratization project marched on in full force under US leadership. This brought forth a unipolar global imperial moment of the US at the turn of the twenty-first century. The resulting “New World Order,” which George H. W. Bush used to refer to the post-Cold War world order in a 1990 speech, hinged on US aggressive intervention to ameliorate recurrent financial crises triggered by both free flow of capital on the one hand and on US military power as the means to topple authoritarian regimes and promote democracy. This new era is marked by the US Treasury’s involvement in the bailout of Mexico amid the 1994 peso crisis, its bailout of several Asian countries during the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999, and the Second Persian Gulf War.

I also delineate how this imperial world order is grounded on the US's quasi-alliance with authoritarian and state-capitalist China. This alliance helped cement the US-centered global circuit of finance and trade and warranted the global supremacy of the US military. The contradictions between US capital and China's state capitalism, China's newfound capability of sustaining its authoritarian regime abroad, and the explosive inequalities within core countries have been eroding the political legitimacy of the globalization-democracy project in the Global North and South, precipitating the current crisis of these twin projects. We will see toward the end of this chapter that, with the unraveling of the globalization and democratization project and the failing of the US global empire, the world is confronted with an emergent inter-imperial rivalry that could lead to world war among great powers.

Crisis of the US Hegemony in the 1970s

In the aftermath of World War II, the US came to become the hegemonic power among all other advanced capitalist countries. With the horror of the Great Depression and World War II that were attributable to an untamed free market and too low a labor share of income, leading to underconsumption and an overproduction crisis, the US led the Western industrialized world to adopt Keynesian and social democratic policies of government intervention, welfare state, full employment, high wages, and incorporation of organized labor into mainstream politics. These policies were also regarded as necessary for preventing the spread of communism to war-torn Europe.¹

This paradigm of activist government and working-class power seemed to work well in the context of the long postwar boom of most Western capitalist countries, which were experiencing uninterrupted industrial expansion amid reconstruction from World War II.² The long postwar boom ended in the late 1960s. The full recovery of Europe and Japan led to an oversupply of manufactured products and hence increasing competition among industrialized powers. At the same time, prolonged empowerment of organized labor and the resulting long rise in wages fomented a wage-price spiral and curtailed profit.³

Over the 1970s, manufacturing profits fell in most industrialized economies,⁴ while the 1973 oil crisis aggravated the downturn. Throughout the 1970s, the US and other advanced capitalist countries experienced frequent

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1. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movement and Globalization Since 1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 2. Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble: The US and the World Economy* (London: Verso, 2003).
 3. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007), Ch. 3–4.
 4. Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 7–47.

and ever more severe recessions. A fiscal crisis of the state unfolded, which was worsened in the US by the failed, costly Vietnam War.⁵

The postwar economic boom and containment of communism, both led by the US, had hegemonic status across the capitalist camp of the Cold War, leading to a profitability crisis in most advanced capitalist countries. Meanwhile, the US defeat in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration’s abandoning the gold standard amid a deteriorating fiscal crisis and gold outflow from the US, brought the US hegemonic status into serious doubt. As an attempt to revive capitalist profitability and restore US leadership in the world, Washington devised the globalization project, followed by the democratization project, in the 1980s.⁶

The Globalization-Democratization Project and the “New World Order”

As one of the primary sources of capitalist decline in advanced capitalist countries is a wage-price spiral driven by increasing wage demands of organized labor, the solution to the crisis has to involve the taming of organized labor. This is done through reorienting the state’s domestic and foreign policy at the same time. Domestically, Thatcher and Reagan, who took power in 1979 and 1980 respectively, launched a direct attack on the unions.

Another key tactic the US power elite employed to discipline labor was a radical monetary tightening campaign in the name of stifling high inflation and rescuing the international credibility of the dollar under Paul Volcker as chair of the Federal Reserve, with the backing of Ronald Reagan as president. Recent research does show that beating back the wage demands of workers was the real and concealed motivation of the monetary-tightening campaign, as it could lead to the bankruptcy of enterprises, layoff of workers, and rising unemployment, dampening the bargaining power of organized labor.⁷

Besides this domestic-oriented tactic, another key means for the US state since Reagan to break the back of organized labor is to take advantage of the rise of low-cost export-oriented economies in the developing world under the “New International Division of Labor” in the 1970s to pursue a globalization project. The anti-labor policy plus globalization led to the massive exodus of

5. James O’Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher, 1979).

6. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, Ch. 4–6; Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Ch. 3.

7. Ho-fung Hung and Daniel Thompson, “Money Supply, Class Power, and Inflation: Monetarism Reassessed,” *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 3 (June 2016): 447–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416639609>; Ho-fung Hung, “Global Capitalism in the Age of Trump,” *Context* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504218792525>.

abruptness but also for its cause and the form it takes.⁴ The anxiety among Asian countries that are caught in this hegemonic rivalry is unprecedentedly high. They bear the pressure from two great powers, in two games with reversed precedence. As time has gone by, the trade war has evolved into a full confrontation between the two countries, threatening to bring about a new cold war, and yet the main battleground remains on the economic front. This is a major difference between the hegemonic rivalry of today and the superpower competition between the US and the Soviet Union in the latter half of the twentieth century. The reason is that China has grown into a major economic powerhouse that rivals the US, a threat the former Soviet Union was never able to pose.

With “power transition” between the US and China imminent, and with the economic game surging to the forefront of US-PRC rivalry, the parameters of international relations in East Asia have changed. Originally, China restrained its actions in the region, as its economic reform, though highly successful, had not yet brought about a surge of economic and military prowess to rival that of the US. From the 1990s through the mid-2000s, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adhered to Deng Xiaoping’s admonition that China should “lie low” and avoid confrontation in foreign affairs to keep the nation focused on domestic matters. Since the global financial crisis in 2008–2009 there has been increasing assertiveness in China’s policy in the region, and the US responded with its “pivot to Asia” and “Asia Rebalance” strategies. However, there were limits to the rivalry between the two countries, as they adhered (at least verbally) to the liberal international order that benefitted both. With the advent of Xi Jinping and Donald Trump, however, and with impending power parity between the hegemon and the challenger, US-PRC rivalry entered a new stage.⁵ President Trump’s emphasis on the economic game, sometimes at the expense of US strategic interests, further disrupts the existing structure, a development that can only be partially undone by his successor. A new age of disorder has descended on East Asia.

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4. The trade war between the US and China looks strikingly similar to the US trade war in the 1980s with Japan, an American ally during the heyday of the Cold War. Hence, the US-PRC trade war is not derived from competition with a strategic adversary. Economic competition takes precedence.
 5. Power parity is the mechanism that touches off fierce confrontation between the existing hegemon and its challenger in the “power transition theory” originally developed by A. F. K. Organski. For the theory and its later development, see A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1968); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, eds., *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Ronald Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000); Ronald Tammen, “The Organski Legacy: A Fifty-Year Research Program,” *International Interactions* 34, no. 4 (2008): 314–32. For a reformulation of the concept by reference to historical cases, see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape the Thucydides Trap?* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

In the literature on the surge of US-PRC rivalry, the emphasis is typically on the interaction between the two antagonists and their domestic politics. Little is said on the role played by the small and medium countries (SMCs) that find themselves on the front line of the hegemonic rivalry. How do the SMCs navigate between the two great powers? What is the response of the antagonists to their maneuvering? Without answering these questions, it would be impossible to capture the full dynamics of the US-China competition. To understand this type of trilateral relations, it is necessary to bring back the perspective of strategic triangle and adjust it for an analysis of asymmetrical power relations among the three actors.

This chapter develops a theoretical framework of "asymmetrical strategic triangle" to analyze the position of SMCs caught in great power hegemonic rivalry. Three types of options are identified for SMCs: partner, hedging partner, and pivot. In East Asia, hedging with the US against the PRC is the dominant strategy. Countries competed to take that policy under structural pressure. A calculus is developed to capture the incentive of competitive hedging. This analytical framework is then applied to Taiwan to account for its grand strategy shift towards hedging partner under President Ma Ying-jeou. However, Ma's repositioning did not last long, as his successor, Tsai Ying-wen, swiftly brought back the old strategy of playing the role of Washington's junior partner. Throughout the process, Taiwan remains the odd one out in East Asia, as its positioning strategy between the US and the PRC is always at odds with other SMCs in the region. Two logics (internal for Taiwan and external for other Asian SMCs) are identified in three time periods (pre-2008, 2008–2016 or Shock Wave I, post 2016 or Shock Wave II) to account for the divergence. It was found that Chinese assertiveness and US mercantilist policy took turns to drive the majority of East Asian SMCs towards the other dominant power, while Taiwan's position is primarily determined by its domestic politics that centers on dueling national identities, hence the desynchronization between the two patterns. For most East Asian countries, hedging is the norm, while for Taiwan hedging is the aberration.

Asymmetric Strategic Triangle

The study of strategic triangles was in vogue when the US was exploring the possibility of involving Beijing on its side in the US-Soviet superpower rivalry from the 1960s through the 1980s.⁶ This concept was then reapplied to the

6. Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (1981): 485–516; Gerald Segal, *The Great Power Triangle* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982); Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Collapsing Triangle: U.S. and Soviet Policies toward China, 1969–1980," *Contemporary Strategy*, no. 4 (1983): 113–46; Ilpyong J. Kim, ed., *The Strategic Triangle: China, the United States, and the Soviet Union* (New York: Paragon House, 1987); Joshua S. Goldstein and John R. Freeman, "U.S.-Soviet-Chinese Relations:

study of other triangular relations, such as the US-China-Japan triangle,⁷ the US-South Korea-Japan triangle,⁸ and the Sino-Russian-American triangle.⁹ One strategic triangle that has attracted increasing attention is Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations. This is sometimes called the “mini-triangle” as distinct from the historical US-Soviet-PRC “great triangle.” Various works have sought to deepen understanding of the logic of the mini-triangle as events unfolded that testify to the interconnectedness of the actions of the trio.¹⁰ A major difference between the traditional strategic triangle literature and its application to the Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations is power asymmetry among the three players in the “mini-triangle.” This feature was noted but not theoretically explored in the literature.

The strategic triangle theory is geared toward analyzing trilateral relations. There are four ideal types of strategic triangle: *ménage à trois* (three amities), marriage (two enmities and one amity), romantic triangle (two amities and one enmity), and unit veto (three enmities).¹¹ In *ménage à trois*, all three players are “friends.” In marriage, two “partners” act against an “outcast.” In a romantic triangle, two “wings” court a “pivot.” In unit veto, the players are all “foes” to one another. With the four ideal types of strategic triangle (*ménage à trois*, marriage, romantic triangle, unit veto), and six roles (friend, partner, outcast, wing, pivot, foe), we can begin analyzing any

Routine, Reciprocity, or Rational Expectations?” *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 17–35.

7. See, for example, Thomas L. Wilborn, *International Politics in Northeast Asia: The China-Japan-United States Strategic Triangle* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1996); Ming Zhang and Ronald N. Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind: The United States, China, and Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 1999); Go Ito, *Alliance in Anxiety: Detente and the Sino-American-Japanese Triangle* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
8. See Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
9. Gilbert Rozman, “A New Sino-Russian-American Triangle?” *Orbis* 44, no. 4 (2000): 541–56; James C. Hsiung, “The Strategic Triangle: Dynamics between China, Russia, and the United States,” *Harvard International Review* 26, no. 1 (2004): 14–17.
10. See, for instance, Wu Yu-Shan, *Kangheng huo hucong: liang’an guanxi xinquan* [Balancing or bandwagoning: Cross-Strait relations revisited] (Taipei: Cheng-chung, 1997); Bao Tzong-Ho, “Zhanlue sanjiao jiaose zhuanbian yu leixing bianhua fenxi—yi Meiguo han Taihai liang’an sanjiao hudong weili” [An analysis of role transition and type change in a strategic triangle: The case of triangular interaction between the United States and the two sides of the Taiwan Strait], in *Zhengbian zhong de liang’an guanxi lilun* [Contending theories in the study of cross-strait relations], ed. Bao Tzong-Ho and Wu Yu-Shan (Taipei: Wunan, 1999), 337–63; Alan M. Wachman, “America’s Taiwan Quandary: How Much Does Chen’s Election Matter?” in *Taiwan’s Presidential Politics: Democratization and Cross-Strait Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 236–59; Alan D. Romberg, “Taiwan in U.S.-PRC Relations: A Strategic Perspective,” paper presented at the conference on “U.S.-China Relations and the Bush Administration: A New Paradigm or Continuing Existing Modalities,” Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California, 2001; David Shambaugh, “The Military-Political Dimension in the U.S.-China-Taiwan Triangle,” paper presented at the conference on “Taiwan and U.S. Policy: Toward Stability or Crisis?” Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, 2002.
11. Lowell Dittmer, “The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game—Theoretical Analysis.”

Southeast Asia among the Powers¹

Lowell Dittmer

To a region still flailing for political coherence, Southeast Asia has brought a distinctive, one might even say creative, approach to regional integration. Since its founding in 1967, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has offered its “ASEAN way” as a solution to Asia’s disorder. And indeed, having brought prosperity and a loose form of unity to one of the most diverse areas on earth, it seems well qualified to do so. Insofar as the “ASEAN way” has succeeded—still contested at this point—it did so not by “iron and blood” or any form of power projection but simply by inviting countries to cooperate. Southeast Asia could be said to lead by example, as a heterogeneous (and initially querulous) hodgepodge of languages and cultures that has learned to live together peaceably. Nanyang to ancient Chinese, to their Indian contemporaries it was Savarnadvipa, and to the Arabs of antiquity it was Qumr. Geographically divided between maritime (Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, East Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor Leste) and mainland states (Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, peninsular Malaysia, Myanmar, and Cambodia), the region functions as a geographic bridge between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, overseeing the vital sea lanes that give China, Japan, and the US Pacific Coast access to the oil-rich Middle East and the east coast of Africa. Because of the region’s fragmentation, it never posed the military threat to the rest of the world that sometimes emanated from Europe or Northeast Asia. This is no Shangri-La, but most strife has stayed within the region. All its constituent states are relatively small, weak, or underdeveloped, perpetually at risk from geopolitically stronger, more ambitious states—Kublai Khan tried to colonize Java, China occupied much of Vietnam for nearly a thousand years and occasionally invaded Burma, in

1. I wish to thank Karl Jackson for his most helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. I am also grateful to the East Asian Institute (National University of Singapore) for research support.

the modern era European imperialism subjugated all but Thailand—until the area was “liberated” from Western imperialism by imperial Japan in the early 1940s, only then to be embroiled in communist-instigated “national liberation wars” over the next three decades.

ASEAN was created in 1967 to deter such threats, expanding since the end of the Cold War to include ten Southeast Asian nation-states. Though a latecomer to the modernization sweepstakes, the subregion has emerged since World War II as a center of economic dynamism, endowed with rich soil and abundant natural resources (regional GDP growth in 2018 averaged over 6 percent). It has the world’s third largest labor force of more than 600 million people, behind China but ahead of the European Union and the United States—and with more than half that population under forty years old (twenty-eight median age), a demographic dividend. With a combined GDP of approximately US\$2.95 trillion in 2018, Southeast Asia now boasts the third largest GDP in Asia after China and Japan and the fifth largest in the world. Although it is too soon to tell, the trade war may leave the region better off than its giant northern neighbor. The GDP of ASEAN is projected to grow by more than 5 percent per annum over the next five years, while intra-ASEAN trade is expected to exceed US\$1 trillion. The latest boom has been in technology, including the region’s first set of “minotaurs.”² The number of Southeast Asian venture capital deals quadrupled from 2012 to 2017.

Southeast Asia is thus both a pivotal inter-regional choke point and a growing source of political-economic value in and for itself. The current disorder from the Southeast Asian perspective stems from the intrusion of power politics into the region, particularly since the rise of Xi Jinping and Donald Trump (in 2012 and 2016 respectively). The Southeast Asians are not historically unacquainted with power politics. But at the end of the Cold War there was a welcome interlude in which the powers withdrew from the region, leaving a power vacuum into which the Southeast Asians attempted to insert their own multilateral dream of new world order. This was done not by expanding outward but by inviting the major powers into ASEAN extended forums as “dialogue partners.” A distinction thus arose between ASEAN itself, consisting of the ten full members, and a periphery of “expanded meetings” open to extra-regional powers: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus (ASEAN plus Japan and China, or ADMM plus), the ASEAN-EU Annual Meetings (ASEM), ASEAN plus three (China, Japan and Korea, or APT), the East Asian Summit, and finally the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), widely attributed to China but actually initiated by ASEAN.

ASEAN has always been loosely structured, but it has codified its own ineric esprit de corps, the “ASEAN way,” into which it sought to socialize its

2. A “minotaur” is a financial term for a venture-backed private firm that has raised more than \$1 billion in equity capital.

larger and more powerful neighbors as dialogue partners. This was defined by Malaysian academician Noordin Sopiee as the “Principle of seeking agreement and harmony, the principle of sensitivity, politeness, nonconfrontation and agreeability, the principle of quiet, private and elitist diplomacy versus public washing of dirty linen, and the principle of being non-Cartesian, non-legalistic.” This spirit suffuses all ASEAN statements of diplomatic principles, as in the 2002 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC): (1) respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) non-interference in internal affairs, (3) settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and (4) renunciation of threat or use of force. And the transformation has been quite impressive: since 1967 no interstate wars have been fought in Southeast Asia, a respectable rate of growth has been achieved, and economic cooperation has increased, symbolized by the establishment in 1992 of an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) with common tariffs. In 2000, China proposed (and ASEAN accepted) a gigantic free trade agreement between China and ASEAN (ACFTA), which duly came into being a decade later; in November 2020 this was expanded into the RCEP, the largest multilateral trade agreement in the world with fifteen signatories.

China’s initiative was more than welcome in Southeast Asia. The creation of a multilateral FTA in the form of the ACFTA, followed by analogous FTAs with Japan and South Korea, has contributed to the rapid expansion of trade and the formation of a web of value chains that have transformed the nature of trade from international to intrafirm. ASEAN-China goods trade increased from \$35.3 billion in 2000 to \$644 billion in 2019 (up 76.6 percent from 2018), overtaking the US as China’s largest trade partner amid the Sino-American trade war. But it has also contributed to large trade deficits for ASEAN countries with China, soaring to US\$81 billion in 2016, nearly eight times higher than a decade before. The attempt to co-opt the Chinese military threat that arose in the wake of the latter’s claim to sovereignty over some 90 percent of the South China Sea took the form of inviting that country to participate in negotiating a Code of Conduct for the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes. A non-binding “Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” (DOC) was indeed agreed in 2002, but since that date negotiations over an actual (legally binding) Code of Conduct have continued inconclusively.

What is the essential nature of “Asian disorder” insofar as Southeast Asia is concerned? Southeast Asia’s bid to survive and thrive as a school of relatively small fish among whales and sharks has been to merge into a larger actor, ASEAN, designed to magnify the power of its ten constituents sufficiently to defend their interests in the international arena. We have seen how this merger appeared to succeed surprisingly well for over fifty years. China was the first great power to take ASEAN seriously as an international actor: it did so by signing TAC in 1992, the first major power to do so, also signing DOC, and by initiating the APT forum and the ACFTA and leading in the pursuit of the RCEP. All this, no less than its well-publicized restraint from devaluing the yuan and extending loans during the Asian financial crisis, was

widely appreciated, breaking much of the ice left from the Cold War. Japan, Australia, and finally Russia and the US also joined ASEAN's regional forums.

Yet ASEAN's Achilles' heel all along has been its anarchic structure: any member can veto, and all members have different bottom lines. To function properly, all members (and dialogue partners) must be willing to fit into a vague but not empty political moral consensus. How shocking, then, that after a twenty-year charm campaign, beginning around 2010 China became a powerful threat to ASEAN's territorial integrity, asserting ownership of ninety percent of the South China Sea based on "ancient history," claiming therewith exclusive jurisdiction over fishing rights, subsurface hydrocarbon reserves, and above all military access, skillfully playing non-littoral states against littoral states to gut any joint resistance to its claims. Though faced with a momentous loss of resources and security by such a potential takeover, due to divisions among its members and fear of Chinese retaliation, ASEAN neither acted nor even dared speak out against these claims, and China has since strengthened its strategic position by paving over and militarizing the seven small islets it occupies (three of which are now the size of Pearl Harbor) and chasing away any vessels that approach them. While some individual nation-states, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, took steps to defend their interests, ASEAN did not.

The second regional cooperation arrangement to collapse in Southeast Asia is the US security network. The credibility of "hegemonic stability," the theory underpinning the postwar American role as "world policeman," has been in gradual decline in East Asia since American defeat in the Vietnam War, accelerated by the unhappy American experience in the Middle East since 9/11. The reasons for this are complicated, but we may point to three factors: first, there were inherent structural weaknesses in the arrangement *ab ovo*—it was bilateral rather than multilateral ("hub-and-spokes"), omitting collective security arrangements like ASEAN altogether; in fact only two Southeast Asian countries were covered (Thailand and the Philippines), and it was an exclusively military ("traditional security") arrangement. Second, there has since been a decline of the relative power of the US in the region, both economically (as a trade and investment partner) and as a security guarantor. China is now the leading trade partner of most Southeast Asian nations and the fastest-growing investor. As for the US security guarantee, the current assessment is that the US has lost its military edge and that American patronage, even formal alliance, is no longer an effective deterrent to subtle Chinese "gray zone" aggression. This was most clearly demonstrated in the Chinese takeover of Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines in 2012, which was achieved by stratagem, not military predominance. America's bilateral security alliances cover only a contingency in which the ally is directly attacked, which China carefully avoided. Third, no alternative collective organization has been conceived to replace the flawed status quo. Obama championed an American "pivot" or rebalance of forces, centered on a high-quality multilateral free-trade agreement (the Trans-Pacific

Partnership, or TPP), but he was unable to get it passed during his eight-year term, and both presidential candidates to succeed him disavowed the arrangement. Trump campaigned as a populist and has consistently focused on renegotiating relations bilaterally, but the Southeast Asians have always preferred to negotiate as a unit. Trump's November 2017 endorsement of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy represents a dawning recognition of the need for a multilateral strategy, but it is still skeletal.

In sum, after an early post-Cold War "peace dividend" period of great power withdrawal from the region, when ASEAN began to spread its organizational wings to envelope greater Asia in a spirit of peace via an endless round of conferences, power politics is back with a vengeance. Power politics, whether practiced by Xi Jinping or Donald Trump, has in common a tendency to ignore multilateral institutions and reduce international affairs to interactions among nation-states. This places the Southeast Asian states at a distinct disadvantage, because though some are larger than others, all are small and underdeveloped relative to the powers. It is for this reason that ASEAN was founded in the first place, and the present and future autonomy of these states will depend upon its political efficacy.

In Western eyes, the major power encroaching on Southeast Asian autonomy since the evacuation of European imperialism has been the People's Republic of China. During the Maoist period this took the form of ideological and logistic support for indigenous wars of "national liberation," but since the inauguration of reform and opening, China has disavowed the export of revolution and taken a more subtle approach, mixing sticks and carrots. China is also geographically closer to Southeast Asia than any other major power is, bordering Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar (on land), the others on water. China is the largest and fastest-growing source of trade and opportunity for economic development, and the ancestral homeland of a large (around 30 million) rich and influential ethnic Chinese minority. Southeast Asians are understandably ambivalent about China, typically seeking to "hedge"—to "bandwagon" while also "balancing"—taking advantage of the opportunities China offers while relying on continuing American engagement to deter potential threats. Those countries with no territorial issues at stake, such as Laos or Cambodia, feel free to bandwagon with China, but those bounding the South China Sea are unwilling to forfeit their stakes. As David Kang has pointed out, the Southeast Asian states have hardly been zealous internal balancers. While some spend more than others and all have escalated their arms budgets, overall regional arms spending has not kept pace with that of the PRC.³ At the same time an external balance among ASEAN states—a pooling of forces—has not proved feasible amid the diversity of cultures, resources,

3. David C. Kang, "A Looming Arms Race in East Asia?" *The National Interest*, May 14, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/looming-arms-race-east-asia-10461>; see also his book, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Conclusion

Lowell Dittmer

The central thesis of this book has been that East Asia, the successful modernizing core of the emerging world, is afflicted by disorder, a disorder that has been steadily escalating without any visible exit ramp. The leading source of the disorder is growing polarization between China and those countries loosely affiliated with it and the American-led rules-based order that was emerging in the wake of the superseded Cold War order. Disorder is no anomaly in East Asia—in the world's fastest-growing region change is constant. Yet this is more disorienting than previous disorders, which took place within relatively clearly structured parameters. But since the Cold War framework fell apart in the early 1990s, no new one has yet generated consensus. We appear now to be moving toward a new bifurcated framework of "Cold War II," but while public opinion has certainly hardened in both China and the United States, there is no consensus in favor of a new cold war. Public opinion in East Asia is even more averse. The economic ties that bind us are thick, mutually functional, and would be costly to sever.

This helps account for the sense of befuddlement that has greeted China's "rise." That rise has been perhaps the most swift and momentous shift in the Asian balance of power since the rise of Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century.¹ China has now moved to consolidate its status, extending sovereignty claims into the East China Sea and South China Sea, introducing a massive new intercontinental infrastructure building project undergirded by new financial and security institutions while at the same time maximizing its role within the existing ones. Pointing to a swift, efficient recovery from the

1. China seeks "Asia for Asians," says Xi Jinping, and intends to build "a future where we will win the initiative and have the dominant position." Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei puts it starkly: "our goal is to stand on top of the world. To achieve this goal, a conflict with the US is inevitable."

coronavirus pandemic, Xi Jinping advertises Chinese socialism as a superior alternative to liberal democracy.

Still, the China challenge is an ambiguous one. China is the most conspicuous beneficiary of the liberal rules-based global order that it challenges. Since its entry into the WTO in December 2001, China's rate of GDP growth reached its peak, becoming the world's second largest economy and largest trading nation, since 2012 the leading trade partner of 124 countries, including most of Asia. China's leaders are thus quite aware of their objective interest in maintaining the global status quo.² China is an active (and increasingly influential) participant in the United Nations, the IMF, and World Bank, the WTO, the Group of 20, and many other multinational organizations (while staying out of those like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that require statistical reports).

The American response has been no less ironic. After years of disappointing "constructive engagement," the 2016 election brought forth a populist sharply critical of the globalizing order America had helped build, leaving a leadership vacuum in forsaken institutions such as the UNHRC or the WHO for China to fill. Yet although "America first" is hardly its most appealing foreign policy advertisement, the West has awakened to China's challenges. The major political response has been the Japan-initiated Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative (FOIP), centered on the "Quad" of democratic countries (the US, Japan, Australia, and India). FONOPS have become more frequent and multilateralized, including France, Britain, and Japan. Despite withdrawal from the TPP, in 2018 the US Congress passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) and Better Utilization of Investment Lending and Development (BUILD) programs to counter the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and in 2019 the Blue Dot Network and International Development Finance Corporation were launched to finance infrastructure investment with largely private funding. The trade and tech war has certainly been mutually damaging but eventually resulted in a promising "first stage" deal designed to rectify the trade imbalance. In brief, the American response to China's rise, after initial ambivalence, has been competitive.

Thus great power politics returns to East Asia. The Cold War's international and regional structures are gone, and ASEAN's attempt to construct a new one has proved strategically impotent. China and the US have emerged as competing architects of the emerging new Asian order. China steps forward with its own set of institutional alternatives, which have been greeted with

2. "Economic globalization has powered global growth and facilitated movement of goods and capital, advances in science, technology and civilization, and interactions among peoples," Xi Jinping declared at Davos. "Whether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean we cannot escape from, any attempt to cut off the flow of capital, technology, products, industries and people between economies . . . is not possible." Full Text of Xi Jinping keynote at the World Economic Forum, *CGTN America*, January 17, 2017, <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

initial enthusiasm but may have reached their fiscal limits. The US responded with a trade and tech war against China, polarizing the region, offering its own set of (fiscally more modest) initiatives. The competition has now been further aggravated by a global pandemic.

Analyzing Asian Disorder

The Asian “rules-based order” is a slightly modified transplant of the Westphalian Peace that ended the Thirty Years’ War. It is in considerable disarray at the moment; the most we can say is that this is now widely acknowledged as a serious problem warranting serious remedial efforts. It would be premature to prescribe a “new world order,” a task that will in any case fall to power-political actors rather than scholars; our goal is to analyze the disorder that inhibits its emergence. In a series of insightful chapters by our international panel of distinguished scholars, the Asian disorder comes into focus from three perspectives: identity, strategy, and triangulation.

Identities

National identity has in political science been considered a core constituent of nation-building, engendering the necessary loyalty to raise revenue and political support for the state to pursue public interests. The concept was introduced into the study of international relations literature in the 1990s, after the collapse of such established entities as the Soviet Union raised awareness of how fragile they were. Identities were reconceived as “constructed” entities, requiring foundations, architectures, hard work to build and maintain.³ The Cold War structures had been built at great public expense; their disappearance resulted in a perceived vacuum, precipitating a rush by both states and international organizations to fill it. Thus we deal here with two aspects of identity: the reconstruction of China’s *national* identity as a “great power,” and the attempt to redefine *Asian* identity. Asian identity is recast as distinct and autonomous from Western identity, sharing some Western values (such as economic modernization) while also prizing its own distinct values.⁴ In the context of rising nationalism throughout East Asia, these two projects coexist uneasily.

As accelerated communication and transportation integrated the region economically, a number of institutions arose to regulate the process; but the

3. See Y. Lapid and F. Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity to International Relations Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Political Identity,” *International Organization*, no. 46 (1992): 391–425.

4. See Gilbert Rozman, ed., *East Asian National Identities: Common Roots and Chinese Exceptionalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

only one to articulate a persuasive unifying vision of Asian identity has been ASEAN, with its “ASEAN way” of peaceful development, mutual respect, sovereignty, noninterference, and compromise, arranged through innumerable meetings. Loosely related to this has been the more controversial formulation of “Asian values” by such leaders as Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew, advocating a regionally distinctive idea system substituting a form of authoritative communalism for Western competitive individualism. ASEAN found early support from Japan, compromised as it was by its history from any attempt to exert national ideological leadership.

China’s ideological commitment to revolutionary class struggle and wars of national liberation initially inhibited any attempt to facilitate intra-regional cooperation, but since the advent of “reform and opening” China has become an active advocate of Asian values as well. In 2017, the Chinese government announced its plan to increase soft power significantly by 2035, declaring that China’s modernization “offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”⁵ China would teach Asia to embrace “Chinese wisdom,” and the Chinese public too would be embraced as part of the “community of common destiny for mankind.” As Xi put it in a 2013 speech, “The more China grows the more it will create development opportunities for the rest of Asia.”⁶ In short, “win-win.” As for the content of these values, they are virtually indistinguishable from those put forth in the ASEAN Charter.⁷

Inasmuch as China, ASEAN, and Japan, all the major Asian actors profess to be on the same page with respect to core values, how could there be any disputes among them? While values and identities may be shared, interests tend to diverge. As Yun-han Chu, Hsin-Che Wu, and Min-Hua Huang point out in Chapter 2, China’s basic dilemma is that the more China’s hard power grows, the more it is perceived not as a benign example but as a “threat.” As noted, China has become the chief trade partner and fastest-growing investor of nearly all Asian nations, but it has also tripled military spending in less than

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5. Xi Jinping, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xin shidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida shengli” [Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era], *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], October 28, 2017, 2.
 6. Full text of Xi Jinping’s speech at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia AC 2013, April 7, 2013, <http://english.boaoforum.org/mtzxxwz xen/7379.html>.
 7. “Throughout its five thousand-year history, the Chinese nation has developed the humanistic-oriented concept of loving all creatures as if they were of your species and all people as if they were your brothers, the political philosophy of valuing virtue and balance, the peaceful approach of love, non-aggression and good-neighborliness, the idea of peace as of paramount importance and harmony without uniformity, as well as the personal conduct of treating others in a way that you would like to be treated, and helping others succeed in the same spirit as you would want to succeed yourself.” Wang Yi, “Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” *Foreign Affairs Journal* 10 (2013): 14.

a decade. Donald Trump has been publicly explicit in his claim that China's continued rise threatens the national interest of the US, effectively weaponizing this fear as a foreign policy rallying call. Deng Xiaoping previously tried to assuage such anxieties with his famous "24-character admonition," in which the most often cited characters were *tao guang yang hui* ("keep a low profile and bide our time"). Hu Jintao revised "China's peaceful rise" to "China's peaceful development" for the same reason. But the Chinese leadership began to chafe at such self-abnegation as early as 2007, and Xi Jinping has since candidly articulated China's great power ambitions, no longer mentioning Deng's watchwords. This represented a subtle shift from seeking to blend into the Asian identity as defined by ASEAN to a proud assertion of Chinese national identity coupled with an offer to lead by example. To assuage anxieties, China has at the same time paid much more heed to "soft power." Shambaugh estimates that the PRC now spends over US\$10 billion per year on what Chu, Wu, and Huang call public diplomacy.⁸ Xi's drive to enhance China's soft power has focused on controlling the discussion of China-related issues throughout the world, often paired with economic statecraft to punish slow learners.

Despite hopes to enhance regional cooperation by crafting a set of distinct "Asian values," social scientists search in vain for the emergence of a coherent Asian identity. The PRC leadership has attempted to midwife such an identity by rhetorically conflating Chinese interests with Asian values. How successful have they been? In a sophisticated data analysis of the three waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) administered by the Hu Fu Center for the Study of East Asian Democracy, Yun-han Chu et al. are able to measure the causal impact of this charm campaign on Asian attitudes. They find widespread support for the assumption that China has displaced the US as the region's main growth locomotive and future economic hegemon, though whether public opinion favors that depends on other factors. Although those who positively value globalization and growth tend to have positive perceptions of China as a role model, there is surprisingly little correlation between economic ties and favorable public perceptions. China's image is lowest in Vietnam, scoring 2.1 on a range of 1 to 6, although bilateral trade and investment has been high. Cambodia has the most favorable perception, and it has enjoyed generous Chinese FDI (foreign direct investment) (and foreign aid), but the rating has slipped from 4.5 in round 3 (2010–2012) to 4.1 in round 4 (2014–2016). In Myanmar, also a major Chinese FDI recipient but with historically ambivalent China ties, China scored only 2.7 in round 4. Even in friendly Indonesia it scores 4.1 in round 4, down from 4.3 in round 3.

Far more significant than BRI funding is positioning in the South China Sea dispute: the frontline claimant states (Vietnam, Philippines) are more

8. David Shambaugh, "China's Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-soft-power-push>.

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