Introduction

In a 13 January 2012 speech to the Asian Society in New York, Australia's Foreign Minister, Kevin Rudd, even while calling for the construction of a 'rules-based' 'Pax Pacifica', was candid enough to note 'a brittleness in the security realities of our region that potentially runs counter to the deeper and economic engagement and interaction we have seen in recent decades'.¹ One does not have to accept Rudd's point about the viability of constructing a rules-based order to agree with his observation on the tension between robust economic growth and a fragile security sphere in contemporary Asia.

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, East Asia is emerging as the central site of economic, political, and security significance. In a major 2011 survey conducted in the United States (US), 45 per cent of the American academics sampled identified East Asia as the region of the world with the greatest strategic significance for the US, up from 30 per cent in 2008.² In the same survey, 50 per cent of American foreign policy practitioners agreed with this assessment. In a noteworthy development, 85 per cent felt that East Asia would be the most important region for the United States in twenty years.³

These findings dovetail with the late 2011 turn in US policy under the Obama administration. In a speech to the Australian Parliament in November 2011, President Obama stated that the Asia-Pacific would be 'a top priority' following the end of the major US commitment to Iraq at the end of December 2011.⁴ These words have found practical expression in Defense Department policy. In its January 2012 Strategic Guidance document, the Pentagon confirmed that unlike other regions of the world, US defence spending in East Asia would not be cut.⁵ The document proceeded to state unambiguously that in the post-Iraq withdrawal era, the US '*will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific*'⁶ (original italics).

In another interesting insight into the view of the future held by people around the world, a 2011 survey conducted by the PEW Research Center found that in 15 out of 21 states, a majority agreed with the proposition that China already has, or will in the future, replace the US as the world's leading superpower.⁷ If the foregoing is any guide, clearly, developments in Asia and the trajectory of China's economic and political power in

particular, will be critical to understanding the nature of world politics in the years ahead.

It is, then, the impact of China's increasing prominence on the world stage, and its repercussions for East Asian international relations, to which this volume attends. In particular, the study is centred on the theme of the security challenges that China's rise possesses. In the first instance, therefore, it is necessary to introduce the working understandings of the central themes that will be used in this analysis. Given the core focus on security implications, the first requirement is to settle how the term 'security' will be employed. While the notion of security can be somewhat elusive, and endlessly divisible down to the level of the individual,⁸ the term as it will be applied here will refer to a broad but simple idea, namely, that security is the relative freedom from dangers, threats and risks to acquired values.⁹

In considering the security issues that emerge in East Asia it will be assumed that risks, challenges and threats, as well as opportunities to maximize freedom from danger, inhere in the international system: that is to say, threats to security arise from actors, be they state or sub-state, that are each endeavouring to pursue, achieve and enhance their interests according to the particular value systems that motivate them. That said, a basic principle of system analysis is that the ability of political actors to gain their ends is dependent, to varying degrees, on the choices and actions of others in the international system.¹⁰ It is for this reason that the words 'relative freedom' from dangers, threats and risks are applied, because there can be no such thing as absolute security in conditions of interdependent decision making. The reason for this is because the actions of one participant will inevitably have consequences for others. Actors in the international system will make choices to either go along with, or equally likely, resist, the choices and actions of other social actors in the pursuit of their own values.¹¹

To a greater extent, it should be evident already how the term international relations will be understood in this analysis. It will be used to refer to the transactions – actual and tangible as well as declaratory and rhetorical – that take place between and among political actors in the international system, be they state or non-state entities, in conditions of uncertain interdependent decision making. Turning towards the geographical focus of this study in international relations, then, the notion of Asia needs to be addressed.

The idea of Asia is perhaps the vaguest and most unsatisfactory of geo-political terms, connoting as it does an amorphous, entirely arbitrary, expanse that stretches from the Bosphorus to the Bering Strait. This volume restricts its field of inquiry to 'East Asia', which for the purposes of this study denotes those states and other political entities that exist

or function along the Pacific littoral. Such an understanding encompasses most obviously China and the territories considered to comprise Northeast Asia (Japan, Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula), along with those of Southeast Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Also considered in this assessment are the implications of events in the East Asian sphere for those actors that may be seen to exist either on the periphery of this geo-political area, such as Australia and India, or else are regarded as major players in the Pacific arena, most evidently the United States. Despite the fact that the terms 'east' and 'west' are coherent only as navigational understandings, these terms will nevertheless also be used as geo-political short-hand to distinguish respectively East Asia from other actors in the international system that are seen, rightly or wrongly, to rotate around a largely US or European vision of politics and economics.

With these above understandings in place, the aim of this book is to offer an assessment of the international politics of the Asia-Pacific region since the end of the Cold War. The overarching question it addresses is this: how can we most convincingly explain the central dynamics of East Asia's international relations? It is the contention of this study that a theoretically informed approach is required which refines the understandings provided in the definitions above. Here, an approach centred on the assumptions of realist theory is particularly salutary. Accordingly, this analysis accepts the following assumptions: (1) states operate in a defined environment, the international system, where the organizing principle of the system is one of anarchy; (2) the central actors in the system are states which are concerned with their own survival; (3) the concern for survival necessitates a reliance by each state on its own efforts; (4) as a first cut, states can be abstracted and analysed as unitary rational actors; (5) at times, it is necessary to move beyond the unitary rational actor assumption and examine the impact of phenomena occurring in the realm of domestic politics, such as nationalism and authoritarianism; (6) the role of the security dilemma and distribution of material capabilities is viewed as central to analysing regional dynamics; (7) states are viewed as seeking to maximize relative gains; (8) states are assumed to be security maximizers rather than power maximizers.

Consistent with a realist focus on the dynamics of relative power and frictions associated with accommodating the rise of powerful states, this book highlights what is arguably the core issue in contemporary Asian and, indeed, world politics; the rise of China to a position of global power. Such has been the breadth and depth of this rise that one analyst has noted that 'from an international trade perspective, all of East Asia has recently become a Chinese sphere of influence'.¹² Such contentions of this nature

will necessarily be debated throughout this study, but the key dimensions of China's rise to prominence will be assessed, along with the responses China's burgeoning influence has generated in states in the regions adjacent to it.

This study will, therefore, examine the factors that analysts have considered important in evaluating the crucial security questions that revolve around the tectonic shifts in power that are said to be occurring in the Asia-Pacific. These include questions relating to economic interdependence in the Asian region, the notable increases in military expenditure, along with expansive efforts at alliance building; the development of regional institutions and the push to foster regional norms and identities. Attention will also be paid to the political economy of the region, with its strong statist element. Finally, this book will examine the increasingly important role that domestic politics, in the form of rising nationalism and the persistence of authoritarianism in the region, particularly in conditions that have, with the onset of a global crisis since 2008, upset political certainties in the West.

MAJOR DEBATES

In the course of the analysis this volume will necessarily wade into, and offer a perspective on, a number of debates that have arisen in the policy-related and academic literature on East Asia's international relations. The first debate concerns the nature of China's regional diplomacy now that it has entered a phase that has witnessed a pronounced increase in its relative power. How successful has Chinese foreign policy been during this period? Much scholarly analysis over the past two decades, especially between 1997 and 2008, has characterized Chinese foreign policy as skilful and adept. In recent years, if there has been any consensus within the academic literature on the topic, it is that China's rise has been at once peaceful and marked by high quality diplomacy.¹³ In Chapters 1 and 2, these claims will be reassessed with reference to the empirical record. One finding here is that China's rise has been associated with numerous frictions. Based on the analysis contained in this study, such findings contest generalizations of the skill and adroitness of Chinese foreign policy. Conversely, it will be suggested that the quality of China's diplomacy has often been exaggerated.

The second debate revolves around two questions. The first question concerns whether, in response to China's rise, regional balancing is occurring. In a related manner, there is the question of how much fear China's rise engenders along its periphery, and will be a principal feature of the investigation throughout Chapters 3 to 6. On the question of regional

balancing, Kang and Chan separately argue that there is little evidence of balancing.¹⁴ Other analysts, however, see significant evidence of balancing.¹⁵ The analysis in Chapter 1, on Sino–US relations, seeks to illustrate that China is increasingly balancing against the US in Asia. Moreover, evidence in this and subsequent chapters suggests that key regional states are increasingly aligning with the US to balance against China. In respect to how much fear China's rise is generating, scholarly opinion is also sharply divided. A prominent analysis by David Kang sees little regional fear accompanying China's rise.¹⁶ By contrast, John Mearsheimer holds that fear is at very high levels.¹⁷ A variety of other analysts stake positions between these two poles.¹⁸

A third debate that this study evaluates is the likelihood of whether Asia will be pacific (or not) in the twenty-first century.¹⁹ A conscious attempt will be made to relate the discussion to the central propositions in current academic literature, which can be summarized along the following lines. A significant proportion of the literature has highlighted the utility of non-material variables, including liberal regime type,²⁰ socialization processes, norms, and identities.²¹ A second strand in the literature focuses on the role of economic variables.²² Other analysts are, though, more impressed with the role of material factors of a different sort, focusing on geography,²³ polarity,²⁴ alliances,²⁵ or specific realist-based policies, namely, onshore or offshore balancing.²⁶ Elsewhere, another set of scholars highlight the role of nationalism, which depending on whether it is instrumentally used by the relevant leadership, can be explained within a realist or a constructivist framework.²⁷ These broad arguments are assessed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The general finding from the evaluation in these chapters is that, in the final analysis, the strategies that regional states, including states on the East Asian periphery like Australia and the US, have been adopting in organizing regional order clearly hinge on material power-related factors, rather than non-material processes, particularly those that suggest the efficacy of grand schemes for regional integration.

A fourth debate addresses the role of the Asia in US foreign policy.²⁸ Here the study evaluates a number of options potentially available for the US in the face of a rapid expansion of Chinese economic influence: what might be construed as the appropriate policy for the United States to adopt? Should the US, for instance, retrench from Asia or adopt an off-shore balancing posture?²⁹ If the US chooses not to retrench should it prioritize either a values-based policy, or power-centric policy, particularly in relation to China? Similarly, what might be the most appropriate role of alliances and burden-sharing in US policy in this era? Chapters 1 and 2 illustrate how American interests are indeed enhanced by a deep engagement with Asia. Also evident is that East Asian states more often

than not benefit from this engagement, and that consequently the US role as an onshore balancer has been critical in maintaining regional stability.

Finally, in the light of China's rise, and the loss of economic direction in many Western states following the global financial crisis, what is the future of the East Asian capitalist developmental state,³⁰ and the related prospects for authoritarian consolidation in the region? Chapters 5, 6 and 7 seek to grapple with the manifold dimensions to which this question gives rise. The success of China's statist economic model necessarily generates questions as to whether what is being witnessed is the reprise of an alternative state capitalist model.³¹ Moreover, since it is likely that an authoritarian China will not be averse to the perpetuation of non-democratic governance, the prospectus is that it will continue to lend moral, if not financial and military, support to such regimes. Thus, if China's economic, political and military muscle continues to grow, can authoritarianism rather than any liberal-democratic decompression be expected to constitute East Asia's future? In considering such issues this volume will explore these questions in relation to debates on comparative political economy, international political economy, and international security studies.³²

OVERVIEW

The chapters that follow will seek to evaluate these themes. In Chapter 1, an examination of the evolution of the Sino-US relationship will be undertaken. Sino-US relations are the linchpin of regional, and increasingly global, stability. The regular occurrence of crises in Sino-US relations that have emerged will be charted. Significant developments in bilateral relations include: the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989; the Most Favoured Nation-Human rights linkage crisis in 1993-94; the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1995-96; the aftermath of the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999; the 2001 EP-3 incident; the subsequent improvement in relations as the Bush administration focused on the Global War on Terror. Finally, the steady deterioration in Sino-US relations across a variety of spheres during the Obama administration will be explored.

Chapters 2 to 5 assess the response of the region to China's rise among its neighbours in the Pacific arena. The key point highlighted by the discussion in these chapters is the juxtaposition of rising economic interdependence and conflict over security issues. This presents a structural dilemma for the states in the region. In particular, these chapters note the increased levels of fear among regional states in the face of China's rise, and attendant reliance on the US as a balancer.

It is at this point that this study explores the divergence between the empirical dynamics of regional international relations and much of the scholarship on the subject. This is the particular theme of Chapter 3. On one end of an academic spectrum there exists a strand of analysis that overemphasizes the utility of economic interdependence, inter-subjective (whether norm-based or identity-based), and institutionalist responses to China's rise. At the other extreme, there has been another strand, often defined in international relations terms as 'offensive realist' that calls for a policy of containment of China. The argument here contends that both extremes in the literature offer an incorrect assessment of the region's international relations. Contrary to the claims by David Kang, Steve Chan and David Shambaugh, there is clear evidence of balancing against Chinese power, but this need not imply the very high levels of conflict suggested by John Mearsheimer.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 also discuss the increasing attempts at regional institution building and economic interdependencies that have emerged in the realm of trade and finance. The cases of Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia will be used to illuminate this particular dynamic, which faces the majority of states in the region. In particular, these chapters evaluate the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has increasingly sought to project 'norms' of good regional citizenship into the broader East Asian sphere partially in the hope of constraining China's growing influence. Here, Australia represents a particularly acute example of a state where only recently has there been an attempt to think seriously in respect to the manifold issues posed by China's rise, and this will be evaluated in Chapter 6.³³

Chapter 7 offers an assessment of the trajectory of the region's domestic politics and political economy in light of the global financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath. This chapter argues that the crisis should be termed the 'Northern financial crisis' for its evident impact on the economies of the US and Europe, while the East Asian economies have demonstrated notable resilience. It is these dramatic developments that have given rise to a great deal of grand theorizing about power shifting from the West to the East and the dawn of a New Asian Hemisphere. The critical issues of state power, nationalism and robust authoritarianism are discussed. Incorporating these factors into the analysis highlights the increasing complexity of regional politics and economics, which ultimately suggests that given the complex security milieu in the Asia-Pacific arena, a degree of wariness should be practised when trying to categorize the future direction of world history in an era that is undoubtedly witnessing much volatility and the breaking down of old certainties.

CONCLUSION

One critical point that emerges from this analysis of the international relations of contemporary East Asia is the need to integrate both economic and military developments, as well as domestic politics, into the analysis of regional politics. There has been a notable tendency in the literature, reflecting the artificial divide between international political economy and international security studies, to focus on either economics or security issues often at the expense of downplaying domestic politics. China's rise to prominence in this regard is multidimensional in nature, and it requires a multidimensional analysis, but one which also reinterprets East Asia's international relations through what over the years has become the increasingly neglected instrument of realist theory, and neoclassical realist theory in particular. Neoclassical realist theory's focus on complementing standard structural realist analysis with the systematic inclusion of domestic level variables can cogently explain much of the international relations of East Asia. Further, it does so by retaining the centrality of material factors in regional politics. This offers a direct challenge to the claim that non-material variables, such as norms and identities, play a central role in the region's international relations. The chapters that follow will illustrate that the strength of these assertions is matched only by the weakness of evidence supporting these claims. If social science is understood as an exercise in testing facts against evidence, then such analyses are more exercises in faith than in empirical validation.

NOTES

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