

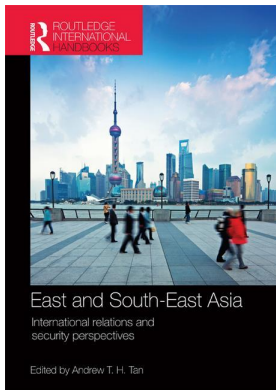
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The rise of East and South-East Asia

Challenges and security perspectives

Andrew T. H. Tan

Introduction

The sustained economic growth of East and South-East Asia, in the context of the global financial crisis in 2008 and the continuing problems in the eurozone as a result of the debt crisis in Greece in 2010, have strengthened the view that East and South-East Asia are emerging in the 21st century as the most economically vibrant region in the world. With the world's second and third largest economies, and generally high economic growth rates (Japan excepted) compared to the rest of the world, it is unsurprising that the region has become the subject of global interest.

Asia's ascent in the global landscape is reflected in projections made by Goldman Sachs, which predicted in 2003 that the three largest economies in the world by 2050 would be the People's Republic of China, followed by the USA and India. Furthermore, China's economy would overtake the USA by 2041 (Goldman Sachs 2003: 3–4). However, this prediction has been proven to be conservative. As a result of sustained high economic growth, China officially overtook Japan in 2010 to become the world's second largest economy, and if present trends continue, is on course to overtake the USA as the world's largest economy much earlier, between 2020 and 2030 (*The Guardian* 2011). China is also steering its economy away from exports and towards domestic consumption, leading to predictions that it would become the world's top market destination for consumer goods by 2020 (CNN 2010).

Although China's enormous size and rapid economic growth underpins the region's emergence in the world order since the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9–11), there are several other smaller economic powerhouses that have also sustained high rates of economic growth. These include: the Republic of Korea (South Korea), which rose from being a Third World developing country into an industrialized powerhouse; Singapore, which is rapidly becoming a global centre for commerce, finance and banking; and Taiwan, which has continued to thrive economically despite its somewhat uncertain future given China's claim over it. Other major countries in the region have also demonstrated steady economic growth, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Viet Nam and Malaysia, all of which had an estimated 5%–7% average annual growth in 2010–11. Despite the fitful state of the economy in the last 20 years, Japan remains the third largest economy in the world. Indeed, East and South-East Asia posted an average growth rate of 8.2% in 2010, with 6.7% projected for 2011 and 6.8%

projected for 2012. This compares with the estimated 1.7%–1.9% annual growth in the same period for the eurozone, and an estimated average of 3% annually for North America (IMF 2011: 67–78).

These developments suggest that an historical change in global power is presently underway. In particular, China's rise as a global power has become perhaps the most significant issue in contemporary international relations, eclipsing even the threat of global terrorism, on account of evidence of emerging strategic rivalry with the USA. China's rise as a regional and global power has been accompanied by growing tensions and mutual mistrust as China challenges the pre-eminent position of the USA in the East and South-East Asia. Indeed, the USA has openly named China as a strategic competitor as well as a potential security threat. In its *Quadrennial Defense Review* in 2006, for instance, fears were expressed over China's military modernization, which was described as having 'the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages' (US Department of Defense 2006). In September 2008 Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern that China could narrow US strategic options in the Asia-Pacific through its development of cyber and anti-satellite warfare, anti-air and anti-ship weapons systems, and ballistic missiles (Breitbart 2008). Indeed, US anxieties over China are becoming greater than those over global terrorism. As David Rieff succinctly explained, 'the Islamists pose a security threat, but that threat leaves the basic structure of American exceptionalism largely untouched ... but the rise of China, and its increasingly global economic challenge to the US, does exactly that' (Rieff 2011: 27).

China's rise has been set in the context of the USA's relative decline. Not only is the USA seriously challenged by its own debt crisis, but it has squandered, in the years after the seminal terrorist attacks on 9–11, the one commodity that could have preserved US dominance and influence in the face of relative decline – its 'soft power' of moral legitimacy, political ideals and culture that it had accumulated since the end of the Second World War in 1945 (Nye 2004). This could be attributed to the unrealistic expectations of the George W. Bush Administration (2000–08) in attempting unilaterally to apply the USA's considerable power to consolidate US global domination for the foreseeable future. The strategic missteps that characterized US strategic policy after 9–11, such as the disastrous decision to invade Iraq in 2003 in the face of global norms and society, have contributed to the accelerated decline of US global power in terms of influence and prestige (Tan 2009: 190).

More seriously, China's challenge is not primarily in the military sphere, but political, economic, social and ultimately strategic. As Halper noted, China's real challenge is its transformative role in the rise of a Chinese brand of capitalism, and a Chinese conception of the international community, which is substantially different from the Western version (Halper 2010: 11). China's rise, set against the economic problems in the developed West, has resulted in its governing model becoming more appealing to the developing world, including in Asia. Indeed, the developing world is gravitating towards China's authoritarian model built around high growth, order and stability, improved living standards and limits on freedom of expression, and away from the developed Western model of market democracy (Halper 2010: x). Thus, according to Ramo, there has been the growing popularity of a Beijing Consensus, centred around innovation and flexibility, equitable development, and independence from outside powers. This is in sharp contrast to the Washington Consensus built around free markets, privatization and deregulation (Ramo 2004).

This is the context that underlies the perceptible worsening of Sino–US strategic rivalry beginning around 2009, when China became evidently more assertive over disputed maritime territory that it claims in East and South-East Asia. This was epitomized by the confrontation

between China and the USA in the South China Sea in the USN *Impeccable* incident in 2009, and between China and Japan over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyudao island in 2010. These incidents have raised global awareness of the need to understand this pivotal region better. In addition, the longstanding Taiwan issue continues to evoke high nationalist sentiments in China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) continues to threaten regional stability through its bizarre and provocative behaviour, epitomized by its sinking of the South Korean naval corvette and the artillery shelling of a South Korean island in 2010 (Han-kyoreh 2011). The danger is that any of these issues could potentially spark a regional conflict involving China and the USA, one which could involve key US allies in the region. These developments have made the study of international relations and security in this region of increasing importance.

However, apart from traditional security revolving around interstate relations and rivalries, the more complex security environment in the region since the end of the Cold War has also led to the emergence of a swath of non-traditional (or alternative) security issues. The broadening and deepening of the meaning of 'security' has been a phenomenon that has gathered pace since the end of the Cold War, with the acceleration of globalization and the emergence of non-military security challenges that have transcended borders, with such transcendence aided by the porous borders of an increasingly integrated global economy. East and South-East Asia have also been particularly ripe for the study of 'non-traditional security', on account of recent apocalyptic environmental events, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the Japan earthquake in 2011 and the resultant nuclear meltdown at Fukushima nuclear power plant, as well as transnational health scares, such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and bird flu health crises.

Added to the list of non-traditional security issues are challenges relating to global terrorism, transnational crime, maritime security (especially piracy), demographic issues (e.g. migration and ageing), economic security (as a result of the impact of globalization in the region), and regional governance (such as the future prospects of regionalism). Non-traditional security issues are just as important as traditional security challenges, as they have profound impacts on societal and human security, as well as having implications for the future strategic landscape.

The relevance of non-traditional security challenges in the region has thus been clear, but the problem is the lack of consensus over the identity and prioritization of the range of such threats facing states in the region. The linkages between traditional and non-traditional security remain somewhat obscure, but there are overlaps discernible, for instance, in the problem of terrorism and maritime security issues revolving around piracy and the maintenance of order at sea. As this author has argued in a separate study on the Malay archipelago, the fight against transnational terrorism after 9–11 and measures to improve maritime security in the context of global terrorism has involved intrusive policies by the USA and its allies, in turn sparking counter-measures by China (Tan 2011: 127–56). The interrelated nature of security challenges within the region means that their poor management could end up exacerbating traditional interstate rivalries and tensions, or else catalysing them where they have laid dormant. Domestically, the broadening of security embodied in China's new security concept in 1996 has also acted as a catalyst for domestic debate over the relevance of non-traditional security to China's modernization and international relations. For China, a stress on non-traditional security helps to counter the growing popularity of the China Threat thesis in the West, and also allows it to engage in a more comprehensive policy of functional engagement with the region (Morton 2011).

The complexity of the array of traditional and non-traditional security challenges points to the need for greater regional co-operation within the context of transnational institutions, regimes and norms, preferably anchored in a growing framework built around the notion of

common security. However, the region as a whole does not possess the regional structures, institutions, norms and regimes that characterize Europe. Whilst the European Union (EU) project has not been perfect and has indeed run into trouble, with growing doubts over the future of the euro, it has helped to provide the structures and conditions that underpin the general peace and democracy within its borders. Although there remain problems which have resulted in the sporadic outbreak of political violence and terrorism, such as in Northern Ireland and in the Basque region of Spain, there exists a general democratic peace which makes war amongst the EU member states unlikely. The same cannot be said for much of East and South-East Asia. Its economic development and growing linkages with the global economy have not been accompanied by the same degree of regional institution building or the kind of intrusive arms control and confidence-building regimes that ended the Cold War in Europe. This is particularly problematic in view of the existence of major territorial and other conflictual relationships as indicated above.

Studying East and South-East Asia is important not just because the 21st century is shaping up to be the Asian century, but also because of the problematic nature of international relations and the breadth of security challenges in this part of the world. The international relations and security perspectives of the key state actors have not, until the recent emergence of evident China–US strategic rivalry and a more assertive China, been well researched, given the context of a general decline in area studies scholarship after the end of the Cold War. Contemporary events and the future trajectory, however, have led to a renewed interest in, and therefore growing demand for, scholarship on the international relations and security challenges of this pivotal part of the world.

Defining East and South-East Asia

The United Nations (UN) defines East Asia (although the term ‘Eastern Asia’ is preferred), as consisting of China, including Hong Kong and Macao, plus North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Mongolia (UN 2009). This definition is consistent with that adopted by the influential Council on Foreign Relations in the USA, although it makes a distinction between East Asia, which it defines as consisting of China, Hong Kong, Tibet and Taiwan; and North-East Asia, which it defines as consisting of Japan, North Korea and South Korea (Council on Foreign Relations n.d.).

However, other definitions have tended to be less precise and more flexible, reflecting political expediency or the impulse towards greater economic regionalism. Thus, the East Asia Summit combines the East Asia region with South-East Asia, as well as India, Australia and New Zealand, although key extra-regional players—namely, the USA and Russia—joined the Summit in 2011 (ASEAN Secretariat 2011). The desire for greater regional integration lies behind Japan’s proposal of a 16-nation Asia free trade zone, which would include the South-East Asian states, plus Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand (Nanto 2006).

South-East Asia has been easier to define. The region is defined by the UN as consisting of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam (UN 2009). With the exception of Timor-Leste, all these states are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the premier regional grouping that has been at the forefront of building the East Asian regional security architecture, through initiatives such as the ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN plus China, South Korea and Japan). In 2009 ASEAN reiterated its commitment to the ASEAN Plus Three concept as the main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian Community, with ASEAN as the driving force (ASEAN 2009).

South-East Asia came into prominence in the global war against terrorism following the seminal terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. On the heels of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in late 2001 directed at al-Qa'ida and its Taliban allies, the arrival of over 600 troops from the USA in the southern Philippines in 2002 was widely regarded as the opening of a new 'second front' against global terrorism (BBC News 2002). However, the key focus of the renewed US interest in the region has been the Malay archipelago sub-region, where the world's largest population of Muslims resides. Indeed, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, and Islam is the dominant religion in Malaysia and Brunei, with a significant number of adherents in southern Thailand, the southern Philippines and Singapore. Since 9–11 this sub-region has achieved prominence in regional and global security, emerging as a strategic battleground between al-Qa'ida and the USA.

The Malay archipelago consists of the more than 13,000 islands in Indonesia, about 7,000 islands in the Philippines, and includes Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, southern Thailand and the southern Philippines. This sub-region is also regarded as maritime South-East Asia, as opposed to mainland South-East Asia, which is connected by land to the rest of Asia. However, Papua New Guinea is usually excluded from discussions in this sub-region due to its greater political and cultural affinity with Pacific Polynesia (Tan 2011: 2).

Security perspectives and non-traditional security

As Ken Booth pragmatically noted, we have to begin where we are; the governments of sovereign states will remain key actors in the world stage. They will continue to serve key functions, such as the regulation of violence, the direction of social policies and the management of external relations (Booth 1998: 349). In this respect, studying the international relations/security worldviews or perspectives of states is a worthwhile undertaking, as it is from these perceived worldviews that they enact foreign policies designed to meet the challenges that they face.

A useful concept used to study such worldviews is that of strategic culture. According to Jack Snyder, strategic culture can be defined as 'the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the vocabulary and the perceptual parameters of strategic debate' (Snyder 1977: 9). Colin Gray has refined this as 'socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation, that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience' (Gray 1999: 51). A third definition comes from Alan Macmillan and Ken Booth, who proclaim that it is 'a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force' (Macmillan and Booth 1999: 363).

The variety of definitions suggests that the study of strategic culture is potentially problematic. None the less, Alistair Iain Johnson has noted that, if done well, analysis of strategic culture could help policy makers establish a more accurate understanding of how different actors perceive the game being played, thus reducing uncertainty in strategic choice. As he further noted, understanding other strategic cultures is especially important as US policy attention shifts to the Asia-Pacific, where US images of the 'other' have been rife with stereotyped generalizations (Johnson 1995: 63–64). Moreover, as Muthiah Alagappa noted, due to its long history and rich cultural traditions, Asia provides many cases for the study of strategic culture and its impact on the international behaviour of states (Alagappa 1998: 10). Thus, understanding the Chinese and North Korean worldviews, and studying how this is reflected in actual practice

through their relations with other key state actors, for instance, is important in advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics and nuances that underlie international relations in this pivotal part of the world.

Interestingly, Alagappa has noted that the realist paradigm provides a good starting point for analysis, since its central assumptions, such as the state as the central actor and anarchy as the ordering principle in international relations, are accepted by policy makers, though not their imputed consequences. Alagappa, however, qualifies this by arguing that analysis and explanation must be modified by insights provided by other theories (Alagappa 1998: 62).

This is where non-traditional security has a role to play. The end of the Cold War and the emerging phenomenon of globalization had a huge impact on the security discourse, resulting in a major debate over the meaning of 'security'. Realists responded to the end of the Cold War by arguing that military threats have become more apparent in a post-Cold War order in which there is an absence of a balance of power. Thus, John Mearsheimer predicted that 'we will miss the Cold War' (Mearsheimer 1990). None the less, the unexpected end of the Cold War and the subsequent debates over the meaning of security and where it was headed led to the loosening of the realist grip on the security discourse that had been evident for much of the Cold War era. The groundwork, however, was laid in the years before the end of the Cold War. In 1983 Barry Buzan's groundbreaking work involved deepening the understanding of security by conceptualizing it within three levels of analysis—namely, the individual, national and international—and widening it to include not just the military sphere but also the economic, political, social and environmental sectors (Buzan 1983, 1991).

This was followed up in 1989 by Jessica Matthews, who argued in an influential article in *Foreign Affairs* that security needed to be redefined, as the planet cannot sustain current rates of economic growth, the expansion of the population and the exploitation of the environment (Matthews 1989). In 1994 Robert Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* shocked Western intelligentsia with its grim depiction of the coming anarchy in West Africa owing to the collapse of the state, population pressures, HIV/AIDS, poverty and environmental scarcities. Kaplan argued that it was now time to 'understand the environment for what it is, *the* national security issue of the twenty-first century ... environmental scarcity will inflame existing hatreds and affect power relationships' (Kaplan 1994: 19, 26). The greater openness to new conceptualizations of security following the end of the Cold War and the evident problems facing humanity explain the receptiveness to the message and ideas of Matthews, Kaplan and others.

Indeed, the two key questions that critics of realism, such as critical theorists, pluralists and constructivists, asked were 'security of what?' and 'security for whom?' The emerging dynamic following the end of the Cold War was thus towards widening the concept of security to include non-military challenges that could represent existential threats, as well as deepening it to include threats that not only affected states but human individuals. The emerging field of critical security studies argued that individual humans should be the ultimate referent for security, as states are unreliable providers of security (Booth 1991: 319–20). The move towards 'human security' gathered pace following the influential UN Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report* in 1994, which contributed to the impetus towards changing the referent object of security from the state to the human individual. The Report defined human security as having two main aspects: safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression; and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions of daily life, whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Crucially, the Report argued that such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development (UNDP 1994: 23). Thus, the concept of Human Security has been adopted by the UN as a key guiding principle. As the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan commented, 'freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to

inherit a healthy natural environment—these are the interrelated building blocks of human—and therefore national—security’ (Annan 2000).

Widening and deepening the meaning of security, however, has its critics. Realists argue that states remain key players, and that military security remains important in a post-Cold War world devoid of superpower hegemony (Walt 1991). Furthermore, securitization of what were not previously seen as security issues could lead to the militarization of areas such as the environment and development. The adoption of a ‘national security’ approach to such issues could end up obstructing global co-operation in dealing with what are essentially transnational challenges, particularly given the tendency of states to prioritize their national interests over those of other states and the interests of the global community. More seriously, the concept of security loses its coherence and meaning if everything is regarded as security (Walt 1991: 213). The so-called Copenhagen School in International Relations therefore accepts the idea that non-military issues can be securitized and that the referent object can be something other than the state, but acknowledges that the state has been a key securitizing actor (Hough 2008: 9). This seems to represent a more realistic (as opposed to realist) approach in view of the continued salience and strength of the state, which remain key actors in the international system, a feature which has in fact become more evident in the age of state-led unilateralism and the re-emergence of great power rivalries after 9–11.

In the final analysis, therefore, a broad understanding of security, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional security, is required if one is to make sense of the issues and challenges that face East and South-East Asia, the most pivotal region in the world today and in the coming decades.

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