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ASIAN GEOPOLITICS AND THE US–CHINA RIVALRY

Edited by
Felix Heiduk

Asian Geopolitics and the US-China Rivalry

This book analyses the ways in which foreign policy actors in Asia have responded to the emerging great power conflict between the US and the People's Republic of China focusing on medium and small states across the Indo-Pacific.

This book offers a much-needed counterpoint to existing analyses on the Indo-Pacific and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and presents a new perspective by examining how great power politics are locally reinterpreted, conditioned or, at times, even contested. It illustrates the policy-level challenges which the US-China rivalry poses for established political and economic practices and outlines how these challenges can be best addressed by smaller states and their societies.

A timely assessment of the power play in the Indo-Pacific with the angle of Sino-American rivalry, this book makes an important contribution to the study of Political Science, International Relations, Asian Studies and Security Studies.

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Felix Heiduk

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Abbreviations

ACSA	Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement
ADMM+	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AJI	Australia-Japan-India Trilateral Meeting
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDN	Blue Dot Network
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARAT	Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training Exercise
CCCC	China Communications Construction Company
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CECA	Australia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
CHEC	China Harbour Engineering Company
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CMEC	China Myanmar Economic Corridor
CMP	China Merchant Ports
COC	Code of Conduct
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSP	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DOC	Declaration on a Code of Conduct
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
EAM	External Affairs Minister

EAS	East Asia Summit
ECRL	East Coast Rail Link
ECS	East China Sea
EDCA	Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G-7	Group of 7
G-20	Group of Twenty
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Grand National Party
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
GSP+	Generalised System of Preferences Plus
HADR	humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO-ISPFS	International Maritime Organisation's International Ship and Port Facility Security Code Programme
IMSC	International Maritime Security Construct
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IPSP	International Port Security Program
IR	International Relations
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JSDF	Japan Self-Defence Forces
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LM-LESC	Lancang-Mekong Integrated Law Enforcement and Security Cooperation Centre
LSA	Logistics Support Agreement
JAEPA	Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement
JAI	Japan-America-India Trilateral Meeting
MBDS	Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCBC	Malaysia-China Business Council
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDP	Major Defence Partner
MDT	Mutual Defence Treaty
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement

MNC	Multinational Corporation
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRRV	Multi-Role Response Vessels
MSA	Maritime Safety Administration
MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEP	New Economic Policy
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSS	National Security Strategy
NTS	Non-traditional Security
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSP	Opioid Substitution Programme
PAF	Philippine Air Force
PAS	Malaysian Islamic Party
PCG	Philippine Coast Guard
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PLANMC	People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps
PN	Philippine Navy
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
Quad	U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific Exercise
ROK	Republic of Korea
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCS	South China Sea
SLOC	Sea Lanes of Communication
SMA	Special Measures Agreement
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SOE	State-owned Enterprise
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
TCOG	Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group
TEU	Twenty-foot Equivalent Units
THAAD	Theater High Altitude Area Defense
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UN	United Nations

UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
U.S.	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

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1 Dancing with elephants

Asia and the Sino-American rivalry

Felix Heiduk

'When elephants dance, the grass gets beaten' is a proverb often used to highlight the challenges great power competitions or conflicts pose for other states. With regard to Asia, the current rivalry between Washington and Beijing seems to make the proverb's core message ring ever so loud and clear. Observers have referred to an 'anti-China mood' in Washington across partisan divides,[1] based on the widespread assumption that Beijing essentially poses a threat to U.S. interests across the board. Accordingly, the 2018 U.S. National Defence Strategy called for a new focus on 'great power competition' with China.[2] The long-held belief that continuous U.S. engagement with China would bring about domestic liberalization in China, as well as turn Beijing into a responsible, peaceful stakeholder of the U.S.-led world order, currently appears to be widely rejected. Instead, China is now perceived as openly challenging U.S. dominance in Asia through, amongst other factors, its trade policies, its assertive foreign policy in the South China Sea, its pursuit of cutting-edge technology (often at the expense of others), its illiberal, state-run market economy, its military modernization programmes and its growing authoritarianism. China is referred to in the December 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) as a 'revisionist power' whose objective is not merely to alter the status quo in Asia and beyond in its favour but to 'shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests'[3]. This in turn is widely understood to necessitate not acquiescence but a bold response from the U.S. and its allies.[4] Hence, many in the U.S. appear to subscribe to the view that the Sino-U.S. relationship has fundamentally changed in recent years from engagement to open conflict.[5]

For its part, China has shied away from such strong language in official documents, but state-controlled media outlets and officials have nonetheless also often struck a more assertive tone. Under the presidency of Xi Jinping, China has been openly aspired to challenge the U.S. military presence in Asia. It has made aggressive moves towards Taiwan and towards U.S. warships in the South China Sea. Anti-U.S.-rhetoric has also prevailed when it comes to what are perceived as sensitive issues surrounding Sino-U.S. relations, such as the country's territorial integrity (i.e. with regard to Taiwan),[6] as well as U.S. interference in China's domestic affairs, for example, with regard to the plight of the Uighurs,[7] or its crisis-management with regard to the coronavirus outbreak.[8] President Xi

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Jinping has repeatedly blamed 'foreign hostile forces' to aim for the destruction of the entire political and ideological system that he helms. With regard to foreign policy, Xi Jinping has made it clear that he intends to reinstate China to what he perceives to be the country's rightful place as a global power and a hegemon in Asia.[9] Additionally, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, for example, has argued for a

> need to work together for the reform and improvement of the international order and system to make it more fair and equitable, and better serve the aspirations of the international community, especially the large group of developing countries which have grown stronger since the second World War.[10]

Chinese academics, too, have argued that the country is now 'ready and determined to reshape the existing order'.[11]

China's rise and U.S. decline?

All of this has sparked a lively debate on the future of the Sino-American relationship, which often tends to juxtapose 'America's decline' and 'China's rise'. Some scholars have argued that fears over China's dominance are largely unwarranted as its technological and military capabilities are still significantly lower relative to those of the U.S.[12] Others have used parameters such as China's growing economic prowess relative to the U.S., as well as domestic instabilities in the U.S.,[13] as indicators of China's certain ascent to regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.[14] Notwithstanding the competing arguments over the possible outcome of the Sino-American rivalry, worries about the impact of the U.S.-China rivalry on Asia as a region are widespread amongst policy makers and academics alike. At the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue, one of the key annual defence and security meetings in the region, senior officials from across Asia expressed their worries about the negative implications a spiralling Sino-American rivalry would have for regional security and stability. As part of his opening speech, Singapore's Prime Minister described the 'U.S.-China bilateral relationship' as the 'most important in the world today' and went further to argue 'how the two work out their tensions and frictions will define the international environment for decades to come'. He also reminded the audience of the devastating impact the Soviet-U.S. rivalry, which he referred to as Asia's 'great game', had on the region during the Cold War.[15] Similarly, Defence Minister Lorenza Delfin from the Philippines spoke of a 'seismic geopolitical shift that is changing the very fabric of international relations in the twenty-first century',[16] while his Malaysian counterpart argued that 'the uncertain relationship between the US and China will remain as an implicit factor in shaping the stability of the Asia-Pacific region'.[17] Scholars like David Shambaugh have also described the Sino-American rivalry as major challenges for the region: 'Under these conditions, managing the competition to ensure peaceful coexistence rather than adversarial polarization of the region – or possibly war – will be the principal challenge for both powers and all states in the region in the years to come'.[18]

From the BRI to the FOIP

The U.S.-China rivalry is most visible not simply in assertive speeches or the current trade war, but in sharply different visions for the broader region. Competing ideas of order for the region have emerged in recent years, with the potential to spark multiple conflicts. For almost 70 years, the system of order in the Asia-Pacific region, often referred to as 'Pax Americana' and dominated by the U.S., had not been called into question. This has changed in the second decade of the 21st century. In the context of China's rise to become the world's largest economy, which has also changed the regional balance of power in political and military terms, Beijing developed its own ideas and concepts of regional order and subsequently launched its own initiatives. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), consisting of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), has become the focus of much debate lately. It is hereby widely assumed that BRI will transform not only China itself, but also its immediate neighbourhood in Central and East Asia, its relations with the U.S., Europe, Japan and other powers, and even global politics and the entire international order. The assumption that BRI will have transformative effects rests on the observation that China will soon become the dominant global economy coupled with the fact that 'it will, most remarkably of all, have done this under one party enjoying a monopoly on power and practicing hybrid Chinese socialism'.[19] More so, BRI was launched at a time when Chinese foreign policy was seen as becoming more and more assertive, while its domestic politics have become increasingly authoritarian. In the years following his ascent to power, Xi Jinping has cemented his own power grip on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the military and the state apparatus, has repeatedly cracked down on opponents within the party and outside it, as well as successfully abolishing term limits on the presidency, which could enable him to rule indefinitely. With regard to foreign policy, Xi Jinping has made it clear that he aims to restore China to what he considers its rightful place as a global power and a hegemon in Asia. He has pressed China's claims over the South China Sea and East China Sea, fostered closer military ties with numerous Asian countries, tightened bilateral ties with dozens of countries worldwide, forged new multilateral institutions (i.e. Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank or AIIB, Silk Road Fund, New Development Bank) and forums, as well as introducing new concepts such as his 'new type of international relations'. Also, China increasingly promotes its own developmental path as a model for other nations. China's newfound foreign policy assertiveness, its growing impact on global economic development and its proclaimed return to global power status are often regarded as outright challenging U.S. power and dominance regionally and internationally. To some observers, the national restoration of China is even 'no longer a blueprint for a single nation'; instead 'Beijing appears to have committed itself to remaking the whole world'.[20]

While observers seem to agree on the BRI's general transformative effects in China and outside China, diverging interpretations of the project's objectives,

drivers and possible outcomes have emerged. The main controversy in the (still rather young) scholarly debate on the BRI concerns the initiatives' drivers: is BRI driven by geopolitical or geo-economic motives? Or, does BRI even merge geopolitical and geo-economic motives into something akin to a grand strategy to transform the existing (Western, liberal) international order? In addition, a second, albeit interlinked scholarly debate, touches on challenges and pitfalls of BRI, especially regarding its implementation but also in terms of concept. This is not all that surprising given the general impression that for all its often flamboyant rhetoric and symbolism BRI has been a slow starter. Multiple BRI projects have been announced with big fanfare, yet little actual implementation. Various Western analysts have argued that BRI may never come fully to fruition due to numerous obstacles and challenges, including a lack of conceptual clarity, high-risk investments with strong associated uncertainties, implementation problems due to the sheer size if the associated initiatives, political instability in partner countries (i.e. local insurgencies) and a lack of concern for local communities or corruption amongst other factors.[21]

These issues notwithstanding, there is little doubt that China's BRI, first and foremost through the construction of interrelated infrastructure projects including ports, highways, railways and pipelines, is having a transformative effect on the region. Hard infrastructure projects in turn have necessitated the complementary creation of soft infrastructure, such as free trade and investment agreements, the internationalization of Chinese domestic technical standards along the routes, and other accords. At the same time, new regional institutions (i.e. the Silk Road Fund) and new forums (i.e. the Belt and Road Forum) were launched by Beijing. Hence, the BRI has often been perceived as a major challenge to U.S. hegemony in the region.

In response to this, in recent years, a number of states have developed alternative concepts under the label 'Indo-Pacific'. First and foremost, the U.S. under then President Donald Trump has attempted to respond directly to the perceived Chinese challenge by presenting a strategic concept called the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) as a counter-narrative to a potential Sino-centric reorganization or restructuring of the region. The FOIP is widely regarded in Washington as a means to rebalance U.S. foreign, security and economic policy towards China. Its main objectives include providing alternatives to China's BRI for Asian countries, securing freedom of navigation throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the maintenance of the (U.S.-dominated) rules-based international order, and free, fair, reciprocal trade between the U.S. and the countries of the region through bilateral trade agreements. In addition, the FOIP-relevant documents emphasize the importance of investments, especially in the area of infrastructure, for the region and strive for a stronger role for the U.S. in the area of infrastructure investment. The U.S. thereby wants to offer an alternative to 'state controlled', i.e. Chinese, investments, which Washington regards has criticized for creating 'debt traps' and overtly benefitting Chinese companies and workers. And past years' revival of the defunct U.S.-Australia-India-Japan quadrilateral security dialogue with Washington

(the so-called Quad) at the helm was widely regarded as an indirect rebuke of Beijing's geopolitical ambitions. The FOIP was also seen as instrumental for the U.S. to maintain its relevance as a resident power in Asia. Thus, there is little doubt that the FOIP's main thrust is directed against what the U.S. government perceives as China's increasingly 'aggressive' behaviour and its attempts to 'undermine' the rules-based international order.[22] In addition to the FOIP, Japan, Australia, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have also presented their own concepts of the Indo-Pacific. France, Germany and the Netherlands are currently the only member-states of the European Union (EU) that have adopted the term and drawn up corresponding strategy papers or guidelines.

As with the BRI, a young scholarly debate on the Indo-Pacific has emerged.[23] And while the majority of contributors seem to interpret it as a response to China's rise and the BRI, observers have pointed out that the Indo-Pacific currently lacks conceptual clarity, too. For the time being, no uniform, homogenous conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific has emerged to date. Rather, the term is used by the U.S., Japan, Australia, India or the ASEAN to refer to very different, in part divergent concepts, which in turn are based on different ideas on regional order. The divergences involve, amongst other things, a) the extension of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area, b) the objectives associated with each respective concept, c) the focus or weighting of different policy fields within each respective concept, d) the question of China's inclusion or exclusion and e) the significance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches to trade and security policy. And while the U.S., in particular, is using the FOIP to openly position itself against China across policy fields, states such as Japan, ASEAN or Germany are not seeking a comprehensive 'decoupling' from China, especially not economically.[24]

The various conceptions or understandings are also reflected in the corresponding priorities and initiatives. While one of Japan's priorities is the conclusion of multilateral free trade agreements, for example, India views such efforts rather ambivalently and withdrew from the RCEP negotiations at the end of 2019. The Trump administration is also opposed to multilateral free trade agreements but is seeking to conclude bilateral agreements. Differences also exist in the weighting of individual policy areas. The strong focus on security and defence policy in Washington is particularly striking here, whereas Japan, Australia and India have so far attached greater importance to areas such as infrastructure development and connectivity. This weighting is also reflected in the approaches chosen: all actors, except ASEAN (which is concerned with maintaining its own centrality), have so far refrained from pursuing multilateral approaches to security policy, though all actors rhetorically stress the importance of existing regional forums such as ARF and EAS. In terms of infrastructure policy, the approaches chosen are mostly bilateral or minilateral. In economic policy, on the other hand, all actors, with the exception of the U.S. and India, prefer predominantly multilateral approaches. In China, however, the Indo-Pacific is viewed, regardless of the different conceptualizations outlined earlier, as part and parcel of an anti-Chinese containment strategy led by Washington.[25]

A binary choice?

Against this background U.S. policy makers have been arguing that the intensifying Sino-American rivalry leaves Asian states little choice but to choose sides. Accordingly, Asian states, and by extension all other states around the globe, now face a stark choice: between a U.S.-centric and a Sino-centric order. Some scholars have concurred with this assessment.[26] The depiction of such choice as one of mutually exclusive types of orders, 'between free and repressive world order visions'[27] as the U.S. Department of Defence put it, seems to create little else but a binary choice for all others. A binary choice between a U.S.-centric order, which 'promotes long-term peace and prosperity' and 'will not accept policies or actions that threaten or undermine the rules-based international order', on the one hand. And a Sino-centric order on the other, in which China is able to 'reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and use predatory economics to coerce other nations'.[28]

Based on a quick glance at opinion surveys, one might infer, however, that to many an international audience such binary choice might appear like one between the devil and the deep blue sea. Take, for example, the global country poll commissioned by the BBC in 2017. It asked respondents to rate different countries, including, but not limited to, the U.S. and China and their influence in the world. One key finding alluded to a massive deterioration of the U.S. image amongst respondents, with China's image also suffering a deterioration albeit less strong. The survey also showed the gap between self-image and external image with regard to the U.S. and China. While 71 per cent of respondents from the U.S. believed their country to play a positive role in world politics, only 34 per cent of respondents from other countries believed the same. Similarly, 84 per cent of Chinese respondents also believed their country to exert a positive influence in global affairs, while only 41 per cent of respondents from other countries surveyed believed so.[29]

A recent Pew Research Center survey ran similar issues and questions past respondents. While in a majority of the 33 countries, a majority of them in Europe and Asia overall had a more favourable view of the U.S. than China, respondents lacked confidence in the respective leaders of the two nations. A majority of respondents actually held negative views of both, Donald Trump and Xi Jinping with regard to their respective conduct in global affairs.[30] Interestingly enough, the available surveys do not provide data on how respondents assess other nations' foreign policy role or conduct.

Alignment, bandwagoning, hedging or staying neutral

Mainstream International Relations (IR) scholarship, too, has perpetually and predominantly been focused on the foreign policies of great powers. This predisposition stems from the assumption that great powers, because of their size and their capabilities (militarily, diplomatically and economically), have historically exerted structural power by shaping the international system and the international order. They have subsequently been regarded to be at the helm of international

politics. It is this assumption about the preponderance of great powers on international affairs, which in turn has effectively led to a bias in the field of IR in favour of the analytical weight of great powers in international affairs. Despite the fact, that, as Han dutifully noted, 'the vast majority of countries in the world are not great powers'.[31] IR scholarship on and in Asia, including, but not limited to, the dominant strand of Realism, has very often subscribed to the aforementioned core assumptions on the preponderance of great powers.[32] For example, China's foreign relations with its neighbours were imagined historically as a tributary system, in which all other states were obliged to serve as tributes in a Sino-centric order.[33] The impact of this predisposition has been manifold.

For starters, it has led to stark linguistic differentiation between 'strong states' or 'great powers' on the one hand, and 'small states',[34] 'weak states',[35] 'small powers'[36], 'tributaries'[37] or 'secondary'[38] states, on the other. More generally, much of IR literature to this day is based on the study of great power politics and how they affect international affairs. Smaller states and their foreign policies are predominantly viewed as heavily constrained in their behaviour by the interests and actions of their hegemons and their structural powers. Thus, it is widely assumed that the respective structure of the international system heavily constrains the foreign policy choices of smaller states. Realists have argued that under hegemony smaller, weaker states lose influence and autonomy and will align, formally or informally, or even bandwagon, with their respective hegemon. A more competitive, open system, however, creates more room for manoeuvre for smaller states as it can enable them to advance their own interests by playing one great power off against another.[39] Liberalists have argued that small states have greater foreign policy options in highly institutionalized, interdependent, rules-based international systems. However, a lack or a dysfunctionality of international institutions, which is often the result of failure by great powers to comply with their principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures, reduces the room for manoeuvre for smaller states.[40] Hence, mainstream IR literature conceives of smaller powers as lacking autonomy and thus acting as rule takers rather than rule makers in international affairs. Risking overgeneralization, it seems safe to state that mainstream IR literature, therefore, traditionally has focused overtly on great powers in order to explain structural change and continuity in international politics. This has often reduced, conceptually speaking, other states to a de facto secondary or tributary role with their foreign policy options strongly constrained by structural factors over which they have little agency.

However, critics have argued against what they regard as structural over-determinism and an overt focus on great powers in IR scholarship; not least, because it potentially reduces all other actors to mere pawns on a chessboard played by great powers. Various attempts were made to assess the role of domestic factors in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of smaller states vis-à-vis great powers. For example, scholarly works have highlighted the role of domestic ideational factors such as ideas, norms and role conceptions in explaining the foreign policies of smaller states.[41] Domestic politics, including, but not limited to, the type of political regimes, the impact of transition or reform processes, as well as domestic

socio-economic power constellations, have also been identified to be important factors in studying the foreign policy behaviour of states vis-à-vis regional hegemons.[42] In addition, studies have found that small states can exercise disproportionate levels of influence internationally (relative to their size and material power capabilities) in specific policy areas due to factors such as their expertise and knowledge, their aid contributions or their close foreign policy coordination and coalition-building with other, like-minded small states in international negotiations.[43] Thus, as observed by Keohane some 50 years ago, 'If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant'.[44]

Whilst the aforementioned Gulliver-Lilliput analogy might be considered a somewhat loose fit for Asia as a whole, the region nonetheless provides multiple interesting case studies on how Asian countries have been impacted, and subsequently made sense of and reacted to, great power competition. Additionally, scholarship on Asia's international politics actually offers a fair amount of analysis on the behaviour of quite a range of Asia's smaller or secondary states, thereby often directly or indirectly questioning assumptions over smaller or secondary states as mere 'spectators' or 'pawns'.

Historically, much of the region has experienced the so-called Cold War as more of a 'hot' one. The wars in the 1970s in the Mekong states of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as well as war on the Korean peninsula in the 1950s, serve as two major historic cases, which illustrate how the conflict between the two superpowers, and their local 'proxies', directly affected Asian states. In response to the 'Communist' threat, numerous states in the region closely aligned themselves with the U.S., some even by entering military alliances (i.e. Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand), whilst others sought close relations with the Soviet Union (Vietnam) and China (Cambodia), albeit short of entering formal alliances.

A majority of Asian states, however, shied away from formal alignment with any of the two blocs during the Cold War. In fact, the roots of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) go back to the *Konferensi Asia-Afrika*, often referred as the Bandung conference, held in the Indonesian city of the same name in 1955. The conference was jointly organized by Indonesia, Burma (Myanmar), Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India. Although many of the countries of the NAM in reality aligned themselves with one great power or another, the NAM did provide a different outlook on international affairs through its core principles: no alignment with any of the great powers, the peaceful resolution of conflict and multilateral cooperation. Hence, the NAM aimed at providing a middle road between the great powers. To this day, it continues to impact on the foreign policy doctrines of some of their members. For example, Indonesia's *bebas-aktif* (independent and active) foreign policy doctrine has incorporated some of the aforementioned NAM principles. Hence, Indonesia, at least rhetorically, has refused to align itself with any great power for decades.[45] Other Asian countries, such as Burma (Myanmar), pursued an isolationist path with little engagement with their neighbours or great powers altogether.[46]

Current scholarship especially on Southeast Asia has revealed that most states in the region actually aim to engage two or more great powers at the same time without fully committing to any of them.[47] For example, John D. Ciorciari, in his

book on the foreign policies of Southeast Asian states, argued that even at the height of the Cold War, Southeast Asian states chose 'limited alignments' with major powers over balancing or bandwagoning. He showed that flexible, contingent engagements of major powers, rather than full alignment, in response to strategic uncertainties have actually been the most common foreign policy pattern in Southeast Asia.[48] Ian Storey has argued while states in the region have benefited from closer political and economic ties to China, most of them try to avoid or forestall any overt Chinese dominance in the region by simultaneously continuing to engage with the U.S. and others.[49]

Conceptually speaking, scholars have closely linked this type of foreign policy behaviour in the post-Cold War era, often labelled as hedging, with the strategic uncertainties that arose from a rising, more assertive China on the one hand, and a perceived decline of U.S. prowess in Asia, on the other.[50] The literature on hedging has steadily grown over the past decade or so and has tried to give answers to many of the core issues related to the practices of manoeuvring great power politics. Hedging is characterized by a deliberate ambiguity of smaller states with regard to their positioning vis-à-vis the U.S. and China. Hedging, as commonly understood, is practised by sending mixed signals – of engagement and disengagement, of closeness and distancing – continuously to all great powers.[51] This is to, from the viewpoint of smaller states, maximise a state's own autonomy by engaging all great powers simultaneously in order to keep strategic options flexible as much as possible. As one scholar put it, 'By long and sometimes bitter experience, we have evolved a strategy for dealing with it: using major power competition to advance our own interests and preserving as much autonomy as possible'.[52]

Although scholarly works on limited alignment and hedging have criticized the traditional Realist concepts of balancing and bandwagoning as unfitting to aptly describe the behaviour of many smaller states in Asia and beyond, the concept hedging is not without its shortcomings either. The latter include the conceptual 'looseness' of the term itself situated somewhere between balancing and bandwagoning, the varying definitions of the term. As a result of such conceptual vagueness, Haacke has pointed out to numerous analyses that have come to produce divergent, at times contradictory, findings regarding which states actually do hedge/do not hedge as well as regarding the factors that lead to hedging behaviour.[53] As such, realpolitik hedging in Asia appears to escape conceptual boundaries by not taking on a coherent shape or form. Thus, hedging by smaller states in response to the dynamism of Asia's great power politics has been at times very diverse in practice, 'with the diversity of strategies a consequence of various factors, including size, alliance relationships, national interests, domestic politics and their capacity for strategic manoeuvring'.[54]

Aims and structure of the book

Regardless of different theoretical approaches, it appears that Asian politics are increasingly dominated by the Sino-American rivalry and the associated competing visions of order for and in Asia. Some scholars have even argued that we are

currently witnessing something akin to a 'new Cold War' in Asia. Some have even argued that all states in the region are essentially left with a binary choice between a Sino-centric and a U.S.-centric order and thus would need to (formally or informally) align themselves with one of the two major powers. Fears are abundant that this would marginalize regional states' room for manoeuvre and drastically reduce their agency to shape regional affairs amidst the Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry. More so, fears exist amongst policy makers that Asian states might essentially become pawns in a great power game.

However, how states in the region actually make sense of and behave in the context of said rivalry has so far been little analysed and understood. To fill this gap, this book focuses on the ways different foreign policy actors in Asia have responded to the emerging major power conflict between Washington and Beijing. How are great power politics (and policies) locally perceived, reinterpreted, conditioned or, at times, even contested? What challenges at the policy level does the soaring great power rivalry pose for established political and economic practices? What strategies and new avenues for cooperation are imagined, and perhaps even applied, short of, or even beyond, an alignment with either the U.S. or China in the rest of Asia? Finally, how are these challenges addressed by Asian states and their societies?

The first part of the book gives an overview on the numerous conceptual aspects of the Sino-U.S. rivalry. In the second chapter of the book, Rosemary Foot looks at the absence of major inter-state wars for more than 40 years in the Asia-Pacific region, which she describes as a state of affairs that has significantly contributed to the progress of the region's societies and economies. She then proceeds to review the factors that have been identified as helping to generate a relatively peaceful outcome for the Asia-Pacific over the past four decades before examining the extent to which those mechanisms are still in place or weakening at a time of strategic transition in the context of the Sino-U.S. rivalry. Rory Medcalf takes up where Rosemary Foot left off by turning to the competing geopolitical narrative that has emerged in response to a rising China, which is increasingly perceived as assertive or coercive. In the books' third chapter, he argues that the Indo-Pacific, far from being an obscure account of words and maps or a mere geographical descriptor, *is a narrative which* helps nations face one of the great international dilemmas of the 21st century: how can other countries respond to a strong and often coercive China without resorting to capitulation or conflict? With the term Asia-Pacific becoming increasingly supplanted by the term Indo-Pacific, in his chapter Rory Medcalf illustrates the emergence, key characteristics, drivers and implications of the emergence of this new strategic narrative. He furthermore aims to discern what difference to people's lives – to their peace, autonomy, dignity and material wellbeing – does a new name for their part of the world make anyway?

In chapter 4, Kim, Joo Hee describes the current order in Asia as one transitioning from what she labels a rules-based multilateral order to an era of U.S.-China competition and with it a new bipolarity. She then proceeds to discuss how a stable, prosperous order in Asia could look like as well as the roles middle powers could play hereby. Drawing on insights from the study of South Korea's foreign policy

vis-à-vis China and the U.S., Kim, Joo Hee then lists numerous ways through which middle powers such as South Korea can manage the changing regional power constellations. Lee Jones takes issue with numerous core assumptions on state and statehood, which typically revolve around questions of geopolitics, the balance of power, the purported grand strategies of major powers, and the form and contribution of formal regional institutions or the so-called 'regional security architecture', which are underpinning much of the current debate on Asia's changing security order. This essentially realist approach operates with a notion of states as coherent, territorially bounded, strategic actors. In chapter 5, he argues that it misses important developments in regional security order associated with the transformation of states beyond this 'Westphalian' model, such as transnational governance networks to address non-traditional security threats or the fragmentation and internationalisation of Chinese state apparatuses associated with China's BRI. Lee Jones' chapter concludes the first part of the book on different conceptual aspects of the Sino-U.S. rivalry.

The second part of the book introduces regional and country perspectives. It starts with two chapters from the sub-region of South Asia. Chapter 6 sees Ganeshan Wignaraja take on Sri Lanka's engagement with the U.S. and China in the post-conflict period, 2010–2019. He lays out why great powers might be interested in Sri Lanka in the context of a scenario he describes as a second Cold War. Then he analyses important aspects of Sri Lanka's engagement with great powers in areas such as trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), development assistance and security cooperation. The author concludes by pointing out various aspects of Sri Lanka's recent experience, which can provide important insights for managing small power–great power relations beyond South Asia. In chapter 7, Jagannath P. Panda argues that minilateralisms, specifically trilateralisms, seem to have emerged as one of the expedient modes or frameworks of multilateral cooperation in Asia. Yet in his case study of the Japan-America-India (JAI) trilateral meeting, the author remains sceptical to what extent the JAI is able to influence the balance of power in the region due to the different foreign policy traditions and divergent strategic interests of its members. The chapter argues that what, however, makes 'JAI' a distinct trilateral in the making is the scope of forging foreign policy complementarities, primarily commercial interests, that exist in the India-U.S., India-Japan and Japan-U.S. bilateral tracks of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Turning to the sub-region of Southeast Asia, in chapter 8, Alice D. Ba discusses ASEAN's position and role in Asia's large power mix. She outlines some of the different ways that multilateral regional institutions, especially ASEAN, have been conceptualized as a response to Asia's changing great power conditions. Her discussion offers some starting points for thinking about the role of regional institutions in Southeast Asian strategies. It then turns to Asia's changing great power conditions, with an eye to drawing connections between the past and the present, and the different strategic effects associated with past periods. The chapter concludes with some additional observations about changing institutional strategies in the context of Asia's increasingly contested multilateralisms. Strategic change (and continuity) is also the focus of Renato Cruz de Castro's examination of the

shift in Philippine policy on China under the Duterte administration in chapter 9. He hereby observes a strategic shift from appeasement to soft balancing. Cruz de Castro argues that President Rodrigo Duterte has adopted an appeasement policy vis-à-vis China's expansive design in the South China Sea early on in his presidency. Duterte is, therefore, widely regarded as having distanced the Philippines from the U.S., its long-standing treaty ally and gravitated towards China. However, the author argues that the Duterte administration's actual objective is to restrain Chinese aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea by maintaining its alliance with the U.S., fostering a security partnership with Japan and pursuing a more active participation in ASEAN.

A somewhat similar research puzzle is undertaken in chapter 10: Hong Liu analyses *how* the American-China rivalries in almost all spheres, ranging from diplomatic, trade, technological to ideological, have affected Malaysia's foreign policy options including its relations with China. His chapter starts by briefly examining the factors leading to the resurgence of Mahathir including the opposition alliance's anti-China rhetoric. The second section discusses complex domestic factors and variables in shaping Malaysia's engagement with China and its stance in the great power politics, under the new foreign policy framework that was announced in June 2019. The third part analyses Malaysia's policies towards the BRI through a case analysis of the East Coast Rail Link project as well as the American-China trade war by examining Mahathir's positions on Huawei, which is at the centre of the trade dispute between the two powers. The concluding section explores the implications of Malaysia's dilemmas in a broader context of international political economy and highlights the important roles of local agency (interests, institutions and players) in engaging great power politics.

Moving from maritime to mainland Southeast Asia, Thi Thi Soe San in chapter 11 points out that manoeuvring great power rivalries (the 'Battle of the Titans') is nothing new to Myanmar as the country had been buffeted by the Cold War for decades. Hence, a strong foreign policy tradition has emerged, which tries to steer Myanmar away from becoming entangled in great power politics. More so, the country's numerous internal disputes and conflicts, rather than inter-state rivalries, have been far more damaging to Myanmar's security. Yet the current administration led by Aung San Suu Kyi in September 2018 signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). Soe San argues that the CMEC will have implications far beyond infrastructure and economic development as it helps to bypass the strategic vulnerabilities of Beijing's oil supply through the South China Sea by connecting the Indian Ocean oil trade to southern China via Myanmar. This could make Myanmar more susceptible to Chinese influence in the future. From Myanmar, the book turns eastward to the sub-region of East Asia. In the last chapter of the book, Seo-Hyun Park illustrates the domestic political constraints – in addition to the external structural pressures – facing South Korean leaders in formulating their foreign policy strategies vis-à-vis the U.S. and China. She shows that political leaders in South Korea must carefully navigate particular narrative frames on alliance-management issues with regard to the U.S., which in turn are linked to the country's particular historical

and cultural context, when discussing foreign policy agendas. This has resulted, she argues, in a polarisation of the foreign policy debate with regard to relations with the U.S. and China in post-Cold War South Korea. Seo-Hyun Park concludes by criticizing these in her view too essentialist discourse in favour of broader debates about South Korea's positioning as a secondary versus middle power, regional versus global power, a system-supporting role or an agent of change.

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