

Book Reviews

Tien, Hung-mao, and Tun-jen Cheng, eds. *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, in cooperation with the Institute for National Policy Research, Taipei.

With international economic and political power shifting out of Europe, Asia, especially its Pacific rim, has emerged as the new global power center. This economic growth coupled with military tensions make the region the likely playground of future power struggles among the principal players, namely the US, Russia, China, Japan, and the Koreas. Taking these into consideration, Taiwanese scholars Hung-mao Tien and Tun-jen Cheng have assembled an array of international experts and present a fascinating, detailed, and above all diverse analysis of the Asia-Pacific security environment.

With its growing economic power, military modernization, and political assertiveness coupled with unresolved historical territorial claims, the People's Republic of China (PRC) dominates much of the security debate in the region. Akio Watanabe identifies China as "the single most important determinant of future international relations" in the Asia-Pacific region. (p. 64)

At the same time, however, there is no consensus over Beijing's view of its world role. The inability of other powers to fathom China's intentions, as well as its capabilities, generates uncertainties and prevents them from developing an appropriate response or adequate strategy. Hence, nations, especially the US, seem to be wavering between containment and constructive engagement vis-à-vis PRC. The end of the Cold War significantly diminished the constructive part and, as Harvey Feldman amply highlights, American policy makers face a new dilemma: engagement versus containment or engagement with containment. As a result, Washington often looks for potential partners in Asia-Pacific who are apprehensive of Beijing. According to one of the contributors, Byron Weng, if it were to become a dominant superpower, "China may well endeavor to reintroduce a Pax Sinica, a new world order incorporating some features of the tribute system, in the name of peace and harmony perhaps, in the larger world." (p. 108) This perhaps is the apprehension of a number of countries of the region vis-à-vis China.

Against the background of these uncertainties over PRC, questions were often raised concerning American commitments to Asia-Pacific security, especially in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. For Ralph Cossa the future of the region "will be most influenced by the ability - or inability - of the United States, Japan and China to interact positively and peacefully with one another." (p. 40) One might perhaps add the Koreas to this list. Any deterioration of relations, let alone a collision, between any two players would adversely affect the regional balance and stability.

The US-Japan alliance is seen as a major stabilizer while US-Korean relations have certain inbuilt limitations, especially over China's role and response concerning

unification of the Korean peninsula. China wields considerable influence over North Korea, has a stake in the stability of the peninsula, and has gained "substantive significance and influence." Hence, Kang Choi and Taeho Kim warn, "to minimize any negative influence from China, to engage China to be a constructive participant, and to strengthen China's position vis-à-vis North Korea, [South Korea] and the United States should approach China with a common stance." (p. 232)

The idea of Great China comprising China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, draws some attention though Byron Weng dismisses the idea of a wholly integrated Great China as "too far-fetched and uncertain." (p. 97) However, his assertion that "China's imperialism has been more cultural, rather than territorial or economic" or his claim that China has usually justified its territorial expansion "in terms of cultural superiority"(pp. 99-100) may not go well with a number of smaller countries in Asia, especially those countries who dispute China's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The Taiwan issue and the Chinese refusal to renounce force and to seek a peaceful and non-military solution pose a serious security threat and Michael Kau presents a detailed discussion of the missile crises of 1995 and 1996. The discussion on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea by Chien Chung is accompanied by a detailed list of islands and inlets that are in dispute. Besides the multilateral territorial disputes, the security environment impinges upon the safety of sea-lanes and exploitation of natural resources, and hence Chung warns that "tensions in the South China Sea are slowly but progressively worsening." (p. 299)

The absence of a detailed discussion on Russia perhaps is the only drawback of this otherwise excellent volume. In short, Tien and Cheng have presented a commendable work where they not only examine the conflicting great power interests in the region but also highlight the internal tensions and differences within each of the principal players. The 18 contributions have been broadly arranged into three sections: great powers, regional cooperation, and flashpoints. Hence, *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific* is a must for any student of international politics.

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