

TOMÉ, Luis (Ed.) (2009). "Introduction" in Tomé, L. (ed.), *East Asia Today*, Lisboa: Prefácio: pp. 9-25

INTRODUCTION

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The rise in international politics of East Asia - the geographical area including Northeast and Southeast Asia – as a macro-region is a modern and ongoing phenomenon, whose regional identification framework is yet not clearly defined. The crossed influences of History, Politics, Economics and Culture make East Asia a very complex and diversified area. However, and despite the heterogeneous nature of the region and its countries, a regional desire has been emerging to give political and institutional voice to East Asia, though its composition and borders remain ambiguous.

Free of both colonial domination, which lasted centuries, and the influence of the superpowers during the decades of the Cold War bipolarity, East Asia is now in an era that Muthiah Alagappa (1988:4) describes as "post-colonial". This does not, however, imply going back in time or is a synonym of regional isolation: on the contrary, today the East Asia region and its nations are more connected to other regions and to the global international system at all levels and in all possible dimensions. On the other hand, not only do "foreign" actors (namely, the regional balancer, the United States) have a great influence on regional matters, but East Asian countries (namely the re-emerging China, Japan, Russia and also South Korea, and the ASEAN group) and the region itself are more important in the framework of international relations. Yet, what happens today is that by being more closely linked to the global system, East Asia is also more autonomous, which implies that its people have more power and control over their interests, objectives and destiny.

For a long time, as John Gerard Ruggie (1993:4) declared, this region was considered an "unworthy" field for theoretical debate on international relations, considering that, in the region, constructs such as the balance of power, hegemony, economic interdependency, identity, social reconstruction, security, State, regional integration or regime theories were not entirely adequate neither to explain nor to foresee the region's future. Applying any of these theories to the evolution of East Asia is still being tested and debated, due to the region's extreme dynamics and complexity. However,

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academics, political leaders, diplomats and journalists have shown an undeniable growing interest in East Asia, since the region is nowadays much more important in the international system, able to deeply influence the world history of the 21st century.

The region's nations have been taking advantage of the relative regional stability and their economic growth in order to attempt increasing the well-being of their peoples, as well as their political, economic and strategic status. In truth, it's in East Asia that one is able to see the most rapid growth of power and influence in international politics. Several poles of economic power, each with a different level of impact in global and regional politics, are in the region, namely, Japan, China, South Korea, Russia, Taiwan and ASEAN¹. Three re-emerging powers, historically important and with political and strategic ambitions at a global scale are in that very region, namely, China, Japan and the Russian Federation. Thus, the relations and the exchanges with the region's nations are today absolutely vital for “foreign” powers such as the US, EU, India and Australia, as well as for other Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries.

On the other hand, the great issues in today's international affairs - from terrorism to environmental degradation, from WMD proliferation to the fight against poverty and sub development, from pandemics and infectious diseases to the unpredictable behaviour of re-emerging powers, from overpopulation and massive urbanization to dependency and energy security, from trans-national criminal activity to the weakened/failed States, from the promotion of democracy and human rights to the effects of globalization, from government repression over its population to natural catastrophes – are all present and closely linked to the region, which means that the solutions for world issues are also dependent on East Asia. Today, no one knows exactly what the future will be like; yet, we all know that the world's future depends greatly on East Asia, the interaction within and with the region.

East Asia today is marked by an extensive and rather dense network of elements which make this a very complex region, which include:

- the extraordinary economic growth of most of the region's nations and the ongoing increase in regional share in the World GDP, turning East Asia into the most dynamic region in the world, both at economic and commercial levels;

¹ *Association of Southeast Asian Nations*.

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- the promotion of all types of interdependency and the significant increase of multilateralism and regional institutional (ASEAN, ASEAN+3², 6-Party talks³), pan regional (EAS⁴, ARF⁵) and inter-regional (APEC⁶, ASEM⁷, FEALAC⁸, AASROC/NAASP⁹) cooperation, as well the non-governmental process or "Track II" (NEACD¹⁰, Shangri-la Dialogue, BFA¹¹, PECC¹², PBEC¹³, CAEC¹⁴, CSCAP¹⁵),
- an historical legacy of rivalry and suspicion, as well as territorial and border struggles (for example South Kurilles/Northern Territories, the Takeshima/Tokdo islands, the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, the Paracel Islands, the Spratley Islands, and the South China Sea)
- persistent stigmas of the Cold War (Korea and Taiwan), which can greatly affect international security;
- the powerful strategic presence of the US, trying to maintain a certain *pax americana*;
- the economic, political and military re-emergence of China, affecting the regional and global balance of power;
- the gradual strategic expansion of Japan, which is gradually letting go of its conventional self-restraints;
- the rise of Russia, South Korea and the ASEAN group, as well as that of India and Australia, as main actors in East Asian affairs;
- the increase in the agenda and security concerns, including non-conventional issues such as unregulated population movements, infection diseases, piracy, transnational crime, environment degradation, energy safety, and economic-financial crisis;
- the coexistence of established democracies (Japan), ongoing democratic processes or still relatively frail ones (Russia, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and East Timor), semi-democratic regimes

² ASEAN Plus China, Japan and South Korea.

³ Joining the US, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea to solve peacefully the problem of DPRK nuclear program, since 2003.

⁴ *East Asia Summit*

⁵ *ASEAN Regional Forum*.

⁶ *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation*.

⁷ *Asia-Europe Meeting*

⁸ *Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation*.

⁹ *Asian-African Sub-Regional Organisations Conference / New Asian-African Strategic Partnership*.

¹⁰ *Northeast Asia Security Cooperation Dialogue*.

¹¹ *Boao Forum for Asia*.

¹² *Pacific Economic Cooperation Council*.

¹³ *Pacific Basin Economic Council*.

¹⁴ *Council for Asia-Europe Cooperation*.

¹⁵ *Committee on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific*.

(Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Cambodia), formally communist regimes (China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos) and military dictatorships (Myanmar), all characterized by a growing nationalistic feeling;

- the general increase in defence budgets and in military capacities in the region;
- a visible and general improvement of bilateral relations and the establishment of new strategic partnerships and new Free Trade Areas (FTAs);
- a greater exposure of East Asian "*developmental states*" to the pressures of globalization, a greater challenge for the region's governments and peoples;
- and an East Asian self-conscious pursuit and community building efforts among most regional actors.

International order in East Asia has been rapidly and deeply changing. The regional environment is today frankly much more positive than previously but the most optimistic expectations which foresee the 21stc as "the century of East Asia" and the region as "The new gravity pole of world power" coexist with negative scenarios predicting the "Balkanization of East Asia" or portraying the region as "ripe for rivalry". Within a framework of rapid and deep changes, the political, strategic and economic options both of East Asian countries as well as of other "foreign" actors have been reconsidered. However, the direction of these changes and interactions in the region are still volatile and uncertain. As a matter of fact, today's uncertainty is still the only certainty in the very confident East Asia.

Defining East Asia

All concepts have their history, geography and, why not, their motives. Throughout the centuries, for instance, the Europeans used to name all the territories beyond the Middle East and the Urals as "Far East", or simply, "Orient", and the geographical boundaries were always rather ambiguous, since the denomination was more closely linked to a cardinal direction than to a geographical area. This designation was obviously coming from a European-centred world and where those territories were in relation to Europe, making it impossible to survive History (Tomé, 2001: 18-19; Joyaux, 1991: 15-16). Yet, even if we let go of all old-fashioned and inadequate concepts, there is still a number of possible designations for the Asian sub-regions, which generally leads to confusion and controversy.

Asia is commonly divided into five major regions: Western Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Equally common are other references to

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Asian sub-regions, such as Middle East, Minor Asia, Indian Sub-continent or Indochina. However, the limits and the nations belonging to these regions do not always coincide. They depend on the criteria (geographical/geological, cultural/civilizational, historical-ethnic-linguistic, political, economical and commercial) and the countries included in the regional groups.

The *East Asia* concept has also different connotations. In some cases it designates the countries of Northeast Asia – the UN, for instance, define Eastern Asia in a very restrict way, including only China, the SARs of Hong Kong and Macao, North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Mongolia.¹⁶ In other cases, Mongolia is part of Central Asia, not East Asia or Northeast Asia, while the Russian Federation is more commonly included in the European countries rather than in Central Asia, Northeast Asia or East Asia. On the other hand, East Asia is frequently confused with Asia-Pacific, particularly in American references. In fact, the concept of Asia-Pacific is either more restrict (includes only the countries of Northeast and Southeast Asia) or more enlarged (embracing all the countries of the Pacific Ocean, Asia, America and Oceania, as partially happens in APEC), depending on the source. Today, the term East Asia is gradually becoming more usual, namely among the region's nations. Their goal is to build a true East Asia Community, thus setting themselves apart from “other” regions. The truth is that even in those cases the limits of East Asia are still ambiguous. Sixteen countries have participated in the East Asia Summits (EAS), with the inclusion of three “non-residents” - India, Australia and New Zealand - and the exclusion of “resident” countries such as Russia, North Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia and Timor-Leste!

This evidences the great difficulty and variety in defining East Asia, which requires an explanation of our own conception of East Asia in this book.

Considering that our main criterion is geographical, our definition of East Asia includes all the nations whose territory is within Northeast and Southeast Asia, with no “exclusions” or “inclusions” of a political nature or other, thus covering the eighteen countries, from the Russian Far East to Timor-Leste, and two sub-regions: Northeast Asia, including Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan; and Southeast Asia, including the ten ASEAN countries – Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia - and Timor-Leste, also seeking ASEAN membership.

¹⁶ United Nations, *Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings: Eastern Asia*, url: unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm (consulted in January 3, 2008).

Map 1. EAST ASIA



Though the geographical limits of East Asia are hard to define, it is even more difficult to find regional identity features. In fact, the region's defining features are heterogeneity and complexity. Factors such as history, geography, demography, religion, standard of living, political regime, development level, among others, demonstrate the enormous diversity of East Asia, as evidenced in Table 1. So, what distinguishes East Asia in the

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international system? Though not fully answering this question, there are two key elements we must mention.

Table 1.
East Asia Countries and "Extra-Regional" Main Actors: Comparative data

Country/Group	Area (000 sq km)	Population (million)	Political Regime*	Main Religion	UNDP Human Development 2007-08 Ranking	Life expectancy at birth (years)
EAST ASIA						
Russia	17,075	140.7	Democracy	Orthodox Christian	67	65.0
Mongolia	1,564	2.9	Democracy	Buddhist Lamaist	114	65.9
North Korea	120	23.4	Communism Stalinist	Suppressed - traditionally Buddhist and Confucianist	n.a.	66.8
South Korea	99	49.2	Democracy	Buddhist and Christian	26	77.9
Japan	379	127.2	Democracy	Shinto and Buddhist	8	82.3
China	9,596	1,330.0	Communist	Atheist - mainly Taoist	81	72.5
Taiwan	36	22.9	Democracy	Buddhist and Taoist	n.a.	77.5
Timor-Leste	15	1.1	Democracy	Christian Catholic	150	59.7
Myanmar/Burma	679	47.7	Military Dictatorship	Buddhism	132	60.8
Brunei	6	0.38	Constitutional Monarchy	Muslim	30	76.7
Cambodia	181	14.2	Constitutional Monarchy	Buddhist	131	58.0
Indonesia	1,919	237.5	Democracy	Muslim	107	69.7
Laos	236	6.6	Communist	Buddhist	130	63.2
Malaysia	330	25.2	Semi-Democratic	Muslim	63	73.7
Philippines	300	92.6	Democracy	Christian Catholic	90	71.0
Singapore	0.7	4.6	Semi-Democratic	Buddhist	25	79.4
Thailand	514	65.4	Democracy	Buddhist	78	69.6
Vietnam	330	86.1	Communist	Buddhist	105	73.7
ASEAN GROUP 10	4,495	580.28	-----	Buddhist and Muslim	-----	69.5
"NON-RESIDENTS" MAIN ACTORS						
United States	9,826	303.8	Democracy	Christian Protestant	12	77.9
India	3,287	1,147.9	Democracy	Hindu	128	63.7
Australia	7,686	20.6	Democracy	Christian Catholic	3	80.9

Note: * The author is responsible for the description of the political regimes and is obviously simplifying a very diverse and complex reality.

Source: CIA *World FactBook*; UNDP *Human Development Report 2007-2008*.

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The first is obviously geography: regardless of diversity, the several peoples and nations are all in a certain area of the globe, more precisely, within the space we call East Asia. Historically, the interactions with nearby peoples were always more intense as a consequence of geography, since there are not the constraints associated to the "tyranny of distance". Geography does not determine identity or the level of interaction among peoples, but since the human being is bound by space and time, being aware that one belongs to a common place does distinguish those who are and those who are not. Thus, a possible means for defining East Asia (as well as Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) is the separation between those who are geographically "resident" in the region from those who are not. This is linked to a second element, which is what Barry Buzan (1998:70-72) defines as interactions between the composing parts, in four main areas: the type of interaction involved, the attitudes towards that interaction, its intensity and content (or what defines it).

As a matter of fact, despite its extreme diversity, there are certain elements and characteristics – such as common historic experience and memory, the idea of "ourselves" in face of the "others", the State's historic role, the *developmental state* character, the concerns with sovereignty and security, political authority, the priority given to stability and economic development, the awareness of common issues requiring regional solutions, the appeal to "Asian values" and the idea of regional "community" – allow us to visualize what we could vaguely call East Asia identification, which goes beyond the fact of belonging to a geographical area. As regional identification/identity is still in its initial stage, it is mostly a result of recent historic experience and geopolitical/geostrategic and geoeconomic ideas. This regional identification/identity is much more consolidated in Southeast than in Northeast Asia due to the ASEAN process.

This is particularly important in our globalized era, since regions and macro-regions have emerged with much more strength and have defined themselves in opposition to others. Thus, the appeal to "Asian values" – in opposition to "Western values" – to the "Asian Century" and the "Pacific Age" or the idea of building an "East Asian Community" both are and reinforce a certain regional identity, i.e. highlight what might be described as the self-reflexive element of regionalism and its inevitable connection to larger global processes (Beeson, 2007: 10). This way, the self-conscious pursuit and the development of regional institutions and dialogue is a defining part of the international order in East Asia today.

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Obviously, this does not imply that East Asia as a whole is undergoing a process of regionalization: despite its visible progress in multilateralism and regional cooperation and the constant appeals to the idea of community, there is still a long way to go before East Asia is truly a unified region, if ever that will happen. Yet, if historically the regional definitions were given by foreigners – with the exception of the ancient sino-centred order and the Japanese "*Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere*" - today a kind of regional awareness is growing among East Asian nations while "other" world actors also gradually accept East Asia as a macro-region of the world. On the other hand, the interactions and interdependency among the countries and sub-regions of Northeast and Southeast Asia are increasing significantly, reinforcing a certain identification of East Asia as a region in global context. Paradoxically and simultaneously, the link and relations of East Asian countries, groups and institutions with countries and organizations of other regions are also rapidly increasing, making "regional borders" much more fluid and uncertain.

About this book

The main goal of this book is to characterize and analyze East Asia today through a series of essays written by some of the most prominent Portuguese researchers who have been studying and analyzing the region, some of whom have even worked or are working in that region. The book includes sixteen essays from eighteen experts, as well as the Preface by Robert Sutter.

So as to ensure a variety of themes, the essays are relatively short and concise, though deep and on current East Asia affairs. Our objective is not to impose any specific point of view or methodology, which may lead to different essays evidencing diverse or even contradictory positions. In our opinion, though, this is one of the most interesting features of this book: to be able to make visible the multiple issues of East Asia today through multiple perspectives. The authors' only concern is to describe the facts and the possible explanation(s) without the restraints of an imposed perspective. We honestly believe this approach benefits the analysis of the complex and diversified East Asia. This also explains the absence of the typical final conclusions: these are left for the readers who will be able to reflect on the present and future path of East Asia based on the several possibilities and explanations the essays propose.

The book is divided into three sections. The First, "*Regional Overviews*", sets the framework of the region's current situation. The two essays included are focused on

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economy and security/geopolitics. In one of them, I characterize and analyze the contemporary East Asian security system and geopolitical order, evidencing the "two faces" in the region. The other, by Henrique Morais, emphasizes the region's main economic and trade trends through their description and weight in the global context and showing the most important regional challenges at economic level.

The Second Part of the book is dedicated to "*Main Actors*". Inevitably, rising China deserves special attention, which explains that four articles are dedicated to this country: Carmen Mendes analyzes national motives, approaches and goals of China's foreign and East Asian policies; Rui Paiva writes about the economic and financial potential and restraints of present China; Alexandre Carriço explains China's defence policies and military modernization; and Félix Ribeiro, Fátima Azevedo and Rui Trindade analyze Chinese geo-economic dilemmas on energy. Heitor Romana also writes about China but compares it to the Russian Federation in terms of "techno-nationalism" influence on decision-making processes of both powers. Russia's policy, priorities and relations with East Asia are the theme of Maria Raquel Freire's essay, while Miguel Santos Neves dedicates his article to Japan's foreign and security policy and its implications for relations with China and East Asia regionalism, and Nuno Canas Mendes explains how far the ASEAN group is a "main actor" in East Asia today. Due to their prominence in regional affairs, two "non-resident" main actors will be also discussed in this second part: the United States, whose options and policies towards East Asia are at the core of Carlos Gaspar's article; and India, the re-emerging neighbouring power whose links and influence in East Asia are the theme of the essay by Rui Pereira.

The Third Part includes four articles on specific issues which have raised "*Discord and Cooperation*". Therefore, Jorge Tavares da Silva analyzes the quite sensitive and frail *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait; Nuno Santiago de Magalhães debates the "poisoned cooperation" in Korea; Admiral António Emílio Sacchetti describes the sea lines of communication and trade in Asia-Pacific region, clarifying their importance and the challenges they represent to the region's actors; and, finally, Diana Santiago de Magalhães discusses the potentials and constraints of Human Security in East Asia today.

Acknowledgments

This book has presented a greater and more complex challenge than I had anticipated. The experience, at least for me, has been truly humbling but also intellectually very rewarding.

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I would like to thank the contributors to the book, a talented and diligent group of scholars and experts. In my opinion, they have greatly contributed to my understanding of East Asia. This volume is truly a collaborative effort, reflecting the best of intellectual interchange and cooperation, and I greatly value the opportunity to interact with them. I am very grateful to all who participate in this book for their contributions and their expertise.

I also would like to thank Professor Robert Sutter. His wide knowledge of East Asia has for long been a source of intellectual improvement and his friendship a personal stimulus. To us, co-authors, it is a privilege to have Robert Sutter's Preface opening this book. The other contributors and I would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude.

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Finally, a few words to our readers. We, the co-authors, do not consider this a concluded task but simply a contribution, among many others, that seeks not only to provide substantial analysis but also enhance our own understanding of contemporary East Asian affairs. As a matter of fact, the dynamic region will always demand further and careful investigation, and several of our findings may also require refinement, development and even reformulation. The other contributors and I hope our readers find this book as useful and stimulating as it was for us to produce it.

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