

Introduction. The Asia Pacific World: A Summary and an Agenda

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At the start of the twenty-first century it was confidently predicted by many that this period would become the 'Asian Century' or the 'Asia Pacific Century.' Now that we are entering its second decade, this prediction still seems on course, despite some dissent (Huang 2009), though the possible meaning of what this might entail has subtly changed. While China's economy continues to grow, suggesting that this could also be termed the 'Chinese Century' (Scott 2008 cf Jacques 2009), there are also new factors in the equation, particularly the rise of India stemming from the economic reforms which took place there during the 1990s (Pike 2010: 651–659, 718–720). These suggest a re-evaluation not only of possible scenarios for the years to come, but even of what we mean by the term 'Asia Pacific.' In this article, we present a brief survey of the main developments which have taken place in the last decade, the changing definition of the Asia Pacific as a region, and the main directions of change suggested by current research.

Grand Narratives of Global Change

Even though the phrase 'Asia Pacific' is used widely in the media and in academe to describe an emerging region, this usage is often imprecise and elusive (Job 2009), and has tended to change over the years in line with changes in the global political economy. Any focus on Asia and the Pacific in the academic literature in English is actually surprisingly recent (Eades 2001). In the early post-war literature, attention was generally limited to places where the Americans and their allies happened to be embroiled in wars, starting with Japan and China, followed by Korea and Vietnam. Economic *development* in Asia was seen as more problematic (e.g. Myrdal 1968), although by the 1960s it was clear that something extraordinary was happening, signaled by the period of high-speed growth underway in Japan. It was only later that the realization began to dawn that Japan was not alone, and that similar processes were also taking place in the four 'tiger' economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan (Wade 1990; Amsden 2004; Pike 2010: Chs 18, 20, 58, 59). By the late 1980s, Malaysia, Thailand and the special economic zones of post-reform China had started to join the growing procession of 'flying geese' (Akamatsu 1962), with India joining even more recently. Earlier assumptions about the nature of dependency,



marginality and economic development started to be overturned, as it was realized that, with the right conditions, economic links with metropolitan core countries did not necessarily mean subordination to their economic hegemony. Even Frank, the main architect of underdevelopment theory, was arguing by the 1990s that Asia had historically long been the center of the world economy and that it was fast regaining its customary place after the comparatively short interlude of the industrial revolution (Frank 1998). The continued rise of China and the acceleration of growth in India over the past decade increasingly support his argument.

The other 'grand narrative' from the 1990s was that of Castells (1996; 1997; 1998), on the effects of developments in information technology from the 1970s onwards. Given that his trilogy *The Information Age* was written as the Internet was just starting to go global, his analysis was remarkably prescient and wide-ranging. He argued that the development of information technology was resulting in a new division of labor, in which the tasks of research, development and production could be carried out and integrated in any part of the world. The most advanced economies were therefore moving from the production of goods to the production and dissemination of information (Castells 1996), and that this was having profound effects, both social and political. Social changes resulting from the new technological and economic order were resulting in changes in gender relations, belief systems (the rise of fundamentalism and new religious cults), and concern for the environment (Castells 1997). Politically, he argued that the new informationalism had weakened the nation state, both because of the media treatment of politics scandal as soap opera (as in the Clinton impeachment saga), and because states were increasingly losing control of flows of information and capital (given the present financial crisis, his description of the stock market as a global casino was also well founded). Failure to compete in information technology, he reasoned, was a major factor in the fall of the Soviet Union (Castells 1998: Ch 1). In the face of the decline of the importance of the nation state, regionalism was becoming more popular, with the European Union emerging as a model for the future (Castells 1998: Ch 5). Smaller states were now prepared to negotiate loss of autonomy over their own affairs for a stake in regional stability. Castells described the rise of a "fourth world" (1998: Ch 2), consisting of the regions of the world outside the new informational networks marked by increasingly vicious conflict, and he also suggested that globalization and information technology would lead to the development of the parallel globalization of organized crime (Castells 1998: Ch 4). In much of this, his predictions have proved remarkably accurate, especially in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts which stemmed from them and the role of a resurgent drugs trade in financing both crime and terror (cf. Glenny 2008). Because of the strains which they have placed on the military and finances of the United States, these wars also seem set to hasten both the decline of the US and the rise of the Asia Pacific (Jacques 2009).

Defining the Asia Pacific: An Amoeba Region

As a result of these changes in the past decade, the definition of the Asia Pacific has also become much more flexible. In terms of its boundaries, it can be likened not to flying geese (Kojima 2000), but the much more earthbound amoeba, with a nucleus and a surrounding body in constant motion. After an early mention of the Asia Pacific as a “new concept” by Japanese foreign minister Miki in 1963 (Eades 2001), the volume of literature being published on Asia and the Pacific increased exponentially over the next four decades, but in spatial focus it kept changing. The nucleus has always been Northeast and Southeast Asia (China, Korea, Japan and the 10 countries of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), but the periphery has changed more easily.

The ‘Pacific’ part of the equation has usually been understood to include Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the smaller Pacific Island States, although their populations are comparatively small in comparison with the insular ASEAN states of Indonesia and the Philippines. The United States comes into the equation because of Hawaii, the Philippines, and its other Pacific territories, and because of its historical relations with the countries of East and Southeast Asia. Indeed, one of the most detailed recent discussions of the region, by Pike (2010), focuses primarily on the United States. He argues that having expanded westwards across the North American continent by the mid-nineteenth century, the United States just kept going, taking over both Hawaii and the Philippines, and projecting its power into Asia (Pike 2010: 27–36). Other definitions of the region have also included the eastern Pacific Rim, the Pacific countries of North and South America, in addition to the whole of the former Soviet Union, as in the series of textbooks published by Routledge and the Open University (Thompson 1998, Maidment and Mackerras 1998, McGrew and Brook 1998, Maidment, Goldblatt and Mitchell 1998). In this definition, events taking place far away from the Pacific Rim, such as in Quebec or the former Soviet Baltic and Central Asian States, became ‘Asia Pacific’ problems. If we add South Asia, as does Dobbs-Higginson (1995), the Asia Pacific would appear to encompass a very large part of the global land mass and of the world’s population. As with the Pacific Rim, the boundaries of the ‘Asia Pacific’ would appear to depend largely on the imaginings of scholars as much as on the facts on the ground (cf Dirlik 1998).

Nevertheless, the way the global political economy is developing at present, it makes sense to include South Asia with the Asia Pacific, as does Tow in his recent discussion of this contested term (Tow 2009: 4, note 5). India and China together contain around a third of the global population, and both seem set to become economic superpowers. Bilateral relations between them are historically problematic, given their boundary disputes in the Himalayas and China’s close links with Pakistan. As their economies grow, so does their consumption of energy (Calder 1998, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research 2009), and their potential impact on the climate is one of the main issues facing the world today. At the same time, their growing economic clout is starting to be felt in other regions of the world as well, as their companies are becoming involved in mergers

and acquisitions in Europe and North America and elsewhere, and as the search for energy and raw materials is leading to increasing investment in developing countries. Thus China's expanding relations with Africa are becoming an integral element in the economy of the Asia Pacific. The new global expansion of these massive Asian economies is partly following in the wake of earlier Chinese and Indian ethnic diasporas due to their historic roles as global reservoirs of labor and entrepreneurial talent. There are also a growing number of institutions coordinating various parts of the region (Dent 2004, 2006; Wesley 2003, 2009), such as the Asia Development Bank based in Manila, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), based in Bangkok, both of which include the major Asian countries together with the Pacific Island States.

If we define the Asia Pacific World as including South, Central, East, Southeast and South Asia, plus Australasia and the Pacific islands, together with their relations with the rest of the world, then what are the current major issues which should be discussed within this framework? These are discussed briefly in the remaining sections of the article, which cover in turn the geographical, economic, political, social and cultural processes at work in the Asia Pacific region.

Geographical Factors

Climate

The first ten years of the new century have seen increasing discussion of the possible effects of climate change, and these are nowhere likely to be more dramatic than in the Asia Pacific region. Part of the new urgency is due to recent surveys of the parlous state of the world's ecosystem (e.g. the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005), and increasingly dramatic scenarios presented by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most recent being the Copenhagen Diagnosis (Allison et al. 2009). In addition, after years of official skepticism, the United States administration appears to be taking the issue more seriously under President Obama, and the recent Copenhagen conference has also dramatized the different strategies and interests of the main players in the debate. The general assumption now being made is that the average temperature will rise by between 2° and 6°C during the course of the century, and that this will result in a significant rise in sea level as the melting of the Greenland and Antarctic icecaps accelerates. The Asia Pacific region is highly vulnerable to this effect of climate change, first because many of the small Pacific nations consist of low-lying atolls, and second because many of the world's largest megacities with populations of over 10 million lie in coastal areas of the Asia Pacific, or in river deltas close to the coast.

A further problem related to global warming faces the major river basins of mainland Asia, many of which rise from glaciers in the Himalayas, including the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow rivers. Currently many of these glaciers also appear to be melting fast, leading to the formation of unstable lakes which

could cause severe flooding downriver once the ice holding them back also begins to melt.¹ Very large populations are currently living in these river valleys, already causing severe pollution, so any falloff in supplies of fresh water is made more serious (World Wild Life Fund n.d.). Some megacity areas of the Asia Pacific, such as Beijing, already have serious shortages of fresh water (“Beijing’s Water Supplier Faces Serious Water Shortage” 2009, Probe International Beijing Group 2008), with major engineering works planned to divert river water from other parts of the country. More generally, scholars such as Smil (1993) have long suggested that eventually China’s environmental problems will have a negative impact on economic growth—perhaps leading to a major shift in industrial policy away from manufacturing, as happened in Japan when it was faced with similar environmental pollution in the 1970s (McKean 1981, Tabb 1995).

Energy

Irrespective of their effects on climate change, one of the major problems of the expanding economies of East and Southeast Asia is a potential shortage of energy supplies. The major mineral oil producer in Southeast Asia has traditionally been Indonesia, but the oil industry there is now in rapid decline. Calder (1998) noted a decade ago that if China were to obtain a standard of living similar to that in South Korea at that time, it would require more than twice the world’s existing supplies of oil to keep it going—and that was without factoring in India, as in more recent analyses (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies 2009). The main energy alternative to oil in China is coal, which has even more drastic implications for climate change than oil, so clearly there is an urgent need for new sources of sustainable and non-polluting energy in the region. Industry in China at present is highly energy-intensive, requiring three times the average to produce US\$1 of GDP (Breslin 2009: 162). However, so far no viable alternatives appear to be coming on stream. Calder (1998) also suggested that China could eventually come into conflict with its neighbors Japan and Korea over supplies of energy—particularly dangerous if all three were to have nuclear arms (Japan already has both the technology and the plutonium, and Korea would be nuclear in the case of reunification). China’s search for natural resources is one of the new uncertainties in the international security system, and these will be considered below.

Disasters

As the last few years have also made clear, the geography of the Asia Pacific region also means that it is uniquely disaster-prone, particularly near the ‘ring of fire’ which runs along the boundaries of tectonic plates bordering the Pacific Rim (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper, forthcoming). The tsunami which followed an earthquake off the coast of Sumatra on 26 December 2004, devastated coastal regions all round the Indian Ocean, but none more so than Aceh in Northern Sumatra. The region is also famous for severe earthquakes on land (as most recently seen in Sichuan in southwestern China), volcanic eruptions

(particularly in Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines), and the effects of typhoons and cyclones (as in Myanmar and the Philippines)—all of which can lead to substantial mortality and the displacement of large populations. Again, the growth of coastal megacities in the region threatens to make the effects of earthquakes and tsunamis more serious than might otherwise be the case, while cyclones and typhoons are expected to increase in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change. Not surprisingly, the international relations literature is increasingly looking at climate change and disasters as important drivers of future political events (e.g. Burke and McDonald 2007).

Economic Integration

It is well known that the world economy is becoming increasingly globalized, and this is directly linked to the geographical factors mentioned above. The period of high speed growth and construction has led to a major expansion of heavy industry. One reason why China generates more CO₂ than other countries is that so much of the world's industrial production is now concentrated there, starting with the special economic zones in Guangdong and Fujian in the 1980s, and radiating out to other parts of the country. China has already become the world's largest automobile producer, as well as a major player in other consumer industries, from clothing to electronics, and has just taken over from Germany as the world's leading exporter of goods. Even though many of the orders for these products ultimately result from investment or outsourcing by multinational companies from outside (on the complexity of which, see Breslin 2009), the growth of China is still often presented in zero-sum terms by commentators in Europe and North America. Standard criticisms include the idea that the growth of jobs in China is taking away jobs from Western economies (e.g. Birnbaum n.d.)—even though it is multinational companies that have relocated there in order to take advantage of Chinese workers' low standard of living—and that maintaining the yuan at an artificially low level also is a disadvantage to European and American exporters (e.g. Wolf 2009). Historically, of course, the high-speed growth of Japan after 1945 was also made possible by a low rate of exchange (Johnson 1982). There is also the fact that China holds huge dollar reserves, and there is much debate as to which might happen if these were to be offloaded in bulk onto the market. Any power that this might give China would be at least partially offset by the harm a crisis in the American economy would do to Chinese exports, but the complexity of the situation doesn't prevent megaphone diplomacy and the formation of pressure groups in the United States lobbying the American government for punitive action against China (Breslin 2009: 105).

Given the problems with currency and trade, many economists in the Asia Pacific region are looking to the European Union for ideas about how to achieve regional economic integration. Earlier impetus for this came from the 1997–1998 financial crisis in Southeast Asia, and measures to avoid similar events in the future. Interestingly, the financial crisis of 2007–2009 has probably had less effect on the Asia Pacific region than

the United States or Europe, partly because of the growing strength of the Chinese economy over the same period.

The establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization in the 1990s was supposed to provide a forum, bringing together both sides of the Pacific to achieve integration (Aggarwal and Morrison 1998), but the nations involved vary too much in size and economic development to make this much more than a useful place for world leaders to meet and discuss common issues bi- or multi-laterally. Of the regional blocs, ASEAN is the most advanced in discussions of economic integration and free trade (Dent 2004), with a developing major financial hub in Singapore. There are also theoretical discussions on financial integration based on baskets of currencies, to replace the dollar after its downgrading in the most recent financial crisis. Given the existing close trade relationships between the countries of East and Southeast Asia, it is not surprising that there are also intensive discussions of free trade agreements (FTAs) between the major economic players in the region, as well as with the United States. Out of these, an Asia Free Trade Area (AFTA) along the lines of the original European Community could eventually take shape. Whether this will produce any greater stability in international relations in the region, on the assumption that nations in the same supply chain are less likely to come into conflict with each other (Friedman 2005), is a moot point, given the hostile rhetoric towards China coming out of some quarters in the United States (for typical examples, see Breslin 2009: 2). Up to the early 1990s, books were being published about the coming conflict with Japan (Friedman and Lebard 1991). More recently they are about the coming conflict with China (Bernstein and Munro 1998).

Politics and International Relations

One of the main issues in the politics of the region has been the extent to which government policy has been conducive to economic growth. The debate was triggered by Chalmers Johnson's famous discussion of Japanese economic growth and the role of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) (Johnson 1982). Johnson argued that MITI and its predecessors in the Japanese bureaucracy had been staffed by some of the best and brightest graduates from the best universities in Japan, and had played a vital role both in the economic expansion of the 1930s and the rebirth of the Japanese economy in the 1950s. Through strategic control of scarce resources such as foreign exchange and oil, it had been able to determine which sectors of the Japanese economy should develop, often, as in the auto industry, with a view to multiplier effects in the rest of the economy. Thus, Johnson argued that the Japanese case shared elements both of capitalist and socialist command economies, and this model became known in the literature as the 'developmental state' (Chan, Clark and Lam 1998, Woo-Cumings 1999). An important role was played by the networks of related companies, each organized around a main bank. Before 1945 these were known as *zaibatsu*, and while they were broken up by the Occupation forces after the war, they reformed in the alliances of companies today known as *keiretsu*.

Even though formally Japan has a democratic political system based on the constitution bequeathed by the Occupation forces after the Second World War, the bureaucracy in Japan is notoriously powerful and independent of government, and has continued to direct the economy despite frequent changes of prime ministers and cabinets. It has also been argued that the tiger economies of East Asia—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong—were organized along similar lines, though later scholars have pointed out the differences between these states (Wade 1990, Woo-Cumings 1999). The usual conclusion is that South Korea is most similar to the classic Japanese model, with industrial conglomerates known as *chaebol* playing a role similar to the Japanese *zaibatsu* and *keiretsu*. Korean high-speed growth was implemented by the tough-minded administration of Park Chung Hee, the Japanese-trained military leader-turned-president who ran the country from 1962 until his assassination in 1979. More recently, China has also been identified as following a similar pattern. The result is that the authoritarian developmental state is seen by some as an alternative to—or a competitor for—the liberal democratic capitalist model of economic development (e.g. Kagan 2008). The state strictly controls the political system, while allowing the economy to roar ahead under parameters set by central government. This model is clearly attractive to a number of countries in the region. Other Asian leaders, including Lee Kuan Yew, have argued the need for discipline rather than democracy in order to develop (Pike 2010: 282).

In addition to the regionalism discussed above, the main trend in the international relations of the region has been a realignment of interests in the aftermath of the Cold War and the ‘collapse’ of communism—which is in fact still alive and (to varying degrees) kicking in four states in the region, namely China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea. Two issues remain from the Cold War period: the continued division of China (Sheng 2001) and Korea (Cumings 2005). The case of China and Taiwan is particularly interesting, given that both countries claim to be the legitimate government of the whole country, and that trade and economic integration between them have continued apace, despite periods of frosty political relations and heightened rhetoric between the two. After the death of Chiang Kai-Shek in 1975, Taiwan gradually democratized and liberalized its political system, resulting in full-scale democracy in the 1990s (Pike 2010: 684-92). Things became so democratic in fact that the Kuomintang (KMT) which had ruled the island since 1945 actually lost the presidential election to the rival Democratic People’s Party in 2000. The new president, Chen Shui-Bian, was seen by the mainland as moving Taiwan towards independence.

At the same time, the KMT in opposition began to pursue a much more conciliatory policy towards the mainland, stressing the common roots of the two countries in the revolution of 1911 and the importance of trade between them. Conversely, the DPP government began to highlight Taiwan’s aboriginal links with the Austronesian peoples of the Asia Pacific region to stress the island’s independence from the mainland and its kinship with other countries, particularly in Southeast Asia. After Chen’s re-election in 2004, he and his family became increasingly ensnared in allegations of corruption, preparing the way for the return of the KMT. At the time of writing, economic links between the two

countries appear to be becoming stronger, symbolized by the liberalization of air transport and tourism, despite the current dispute over US arms sales to Taiwan. Nevertheless, by the end of the twentieth century, economic integration was already strong enough for commentators to talk about 'China, Taiwan, Hong Kong Inc.' (Webb and Kemenade 1997) and 'Greater China' (Naughton 1997).

The picture is very different between North and South Korea, where relations continue to oscillate between bad and very bad. Despite the apparent rapprochement between Kim Daejung of South Korea and Kim Jong-Il of North Korea in the late 1990s resulting from Kim Daejung's 'sunshine policy', relations between North Korea and the other countries of the region have continued to lurch from crisis to crisis since.

The basic parameters for a possible agreement have been clear for a long time (Harrison 2003, Chinoy 2008). The regime in the North wants direct negotiations with the United States and access to aid and energy without threatening its survival. The United States wants an end to its nuclear weapons program. After the negotiations between the Clinton administration and North Korea ultimately led to nothing, the Bush administration insisted that talks should take place within the context of the six parties—the two Koreas, plus the United States, China, Russia, and Japan. At the same time, the current South Korean regime of President Lee Myung-Bak has adopted a tougher line against the North than its predecessor, angering Kim Jong-Il, and leading to a resumption of nuclear activity—including the fully successful detonation of an atomic bomb in May 2009. As a complicating factor, the health of Kim Jong-Il has been in question, and there has even been speculation about the succession within the family should he disappear from the scene. There has also been much discussion of the role of China, and whether or not it can persuade North Korea to adopt an economic reform program similar to its own after 1978. This would help alleviate the shortages of food which seem to have been endemic in North Korea ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union effectively cut off its major supply of fuel for both industry and agriculture. So far it seems that the regime's control of information and the education system in the North have helped keep the regime in power, though it is uncertain how long this can continue, especially if Kim were to depart the scene. Exercises such as the recent revaluation of the North Korean Won, which effectively wiped out the savings of many people throughout the country, seem to be more in line with maintaining political control over the population rather than economic reform. And unlike the population of Myanmar, the other most repressive regime in the region, the citizens of North Korea generally lack mobile phones through which they can organize, protest, and establish links with the outside world.

Threats to Stability

In addition to the left-over issues from the Cold War, a number of other issues tending to destabilize regimes are increasingly noticeable in the region.

Corruption

The first is that of corruption. Here, there may be some improvement since the 1990s in terms of transparency: the Suharto regime, a byword for cronyism throughout the region was toppled in Indonesia in 1998 (Pike 2010: 544–557), and regimes in both Thailand and Taiwan have attempted to bring former prime ministers to book for alleged offences (Pike 2010: 711–713). However, the allegations against both Chen Shui Bian of Taiwan and Thaksin Shinawatra, the former prime minister of Thailand, appear to be part of specifically national party political struggles. In the Thai case, this reflects a cleavage between the urban middle classes and the poorer rural areas, and also between groups with opposing visions for the role and future of the monarchy. The military government that took power from Thaksin was implicitly supported by the King, though when elections were held, they only underlined the continuing popularity of Thaksin's party. With ethnic conflict in the south flaring up as well as the advanced age of the King, Thailand remains in a state of low level political crisis and uncertainty, reflected in the colors of the t-shirts of the rival factions periodically taking to the streets. But certainly corruption in many other countries of the region, and opposition to it, remains a destabilizing factor. This includes China (Breslin 2009: 169–174) where there are numerous local-level demonstrations against officialdom (e.g. Lee 2007), though they rarely make the headlines in the carefully controlled Chinese media.

Terrorism

While the attacks on New York of 9/11, 2001, highlighted the growing relationship between religion, politics, and opposition to European and American hegemony, these relationships had already become clear in the Asia Pacific region, especially in the Southern Philippines, where an Islamic insurgency dates back many years. Recent years have seen an intensification of religious conflict in the Philippines (Banlaoi 2009), as well as in the predominantly Muslim southern provinces of Thailand (McCargo 2008). Islam has also been used as a vehicle for organizing demands for independence in Aceh (Reid 2006), though the catastrophe that befell the province as a result of the 2004 tsunami effectively weakened the independence movement there. Through the mediation of the former Finnish president (and Nobel Prize winner) Martti Ahtisaari in 2005, the Indonesian government was able to arrange a peace deal, offering limited autonomy in return for disarmament by the liberation movement.

The settlement of the long-running conflict and violence followed Indonesia's takeover of East Timor (Kiernan 2003) has resulted in an uneasy independence there as well. Meanwhile the insurgency in Western Papua, which Indonesia took over from the Dutch after the rest of Indonesia (Lagerberg 1980), continues at a low level, fuelled by discontent over Indonesian exploitation of local agricultural and mineral resources (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004). The East Timor problem resulted from Indonesia's expansionism during the Suharto regime, initially supported by Europe and America who saw him as a bulwark

against communism (Pike 2010: 548). But the most serious recent incident of terrorism in Indonesia occurred in Bali, with the bombing of two bars frequented by tourists in October 2002. Many of the victims were Australians and Americans. In retrospect, Bali was an obvious soft target because of its largely Hindu population and its large tourist industry (Hitchcock and Putra 2007); but it is also often forgotten that Bali has had a history of intense political violence in the not-too-distant past, with the massacres which took place there in the mid-1960s (Vickers 1997, Robinson 1995).

More widely, the 'War on Terror' launched by the Americans after 9/11 has allowed regimes in the region to claim that local insurgencies there, too, are part of the global struggle against terror. Indeed, the Chinese have frequently invoked the discourse of terrorism in its dealings with Falun Gong (Zhao 2003), whose main sin appears to have been to organize an effective political demonstration on a main street in Beijing, as well as in relation to the Uighur ethnic insurgency in Xinjiang. Myanmar does the same in relation to its long-standing ethnic insurgencies among the Kachin and Karen (Pike 2010: 600–611). All these conflicts can also be seen as typical cultural and political disputes between central governments and peripheral ethnic groups, often living in mountain areas, which are historically typical of the region as a whole.

International Crime

The other area linked to corruption is international crime. Concern with organized crime and increasing integration between the networks in different countries has also been growing over the last decade (Glenny 2008). This depends on the profits to be made in each sector, and that in turn depends on criminalization of particular types of goods and services in various countries, such as drugs and prostitution.

The market for drugs and their criminalization in the United States creates enormous opportunities and profits throughout the region for both producers and distributors. The popularity of drugs among the American military during the Vietnam War created a major market in Southeast Asia, and the troops took their habit with them back home to the United States when the war was over. Many of the drugs came from the so-called Golden Triangle on the borders of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and others came from the region along the border between Myanmar and China (Lintner 2002) and from Afghanistan. More recently, it is important to note that the resumption of war in Afghanistan (post the Soviet withdrawal and led by the USA and the UK) brought about the fall of the Taliban who had managed to eradicate much of this industry, and it took off again. The current low price of Afghan opium in turn has contributed to the collapse of the production of this drug in Southeast Asia. The producers in Myanmar and the Golden Triangle have moved into the production of amphetamines instead.

One of the main authorities on the criminal networks in Asia is a German writer based in Bangkok, Bertil Lintner, who has traced the activities of numerous groups in the region, including the triads in China and Hong Kong, the Russian Mafia, and the *yakuza* in Japan, in addition to groups with interests in gambling in Macau and further afield (Lintner

2002). The *yakuza* are unusual in that they operate openly, or did so until shooting incidents in the early 1990s led to a crackdown by the Japanese police and new legislation (Hill 2006). The *yakuza* in turn sought the advice of their lawyers on how to get around the new restrictions, and moved to a franchise operation, in which low-level groups pay the higher echelons of the major gangs for the rights to use their names and insignia. This results in a situation in which gang bosses no longer have to commit any crimes to stay in business: they simply sit back and the money rolls in.

Most of the criminal groups in the region also deal in human beings, either male labor for construction jobs, or female labor for the sex industry. This is a result of some of the demographic changes and imbalances taking place in the region, and it is to these that we now turn.

Social Change in the Asia Pacific

Some of the most dramatic changes in rapidly developing societies concern population dynamics—increased life expectancy, and a rapid reduction first in death rates and then in the birthrate. In the Asia Pacific region, the lead has been taken by Japan which now has the longest life expectancy in the world, coupled with one of the lowest birthrates (Knight and Traphagan 2003). The result is a rapidly aging society, and a population which will contract rapidly throughout the rest of the century, reaching pre-World War II levels once more around 2050, if present conditions hold. The impact of this has been particularly dramatic in Japanese rural areas and the smaller towns and cities, particularly in the northern parts of the country. This in turn has severe implications for the labor supply, the economics of health and welfare, taxation and pension policies, and the education industry, and is now being replicated in China and South Korea, amongst others in the region.

Migration

The shortage of labor in most countries is met increasingly through an influx of foreign labor (Castles and Miller 2009). Despite its reputation as a homogeneous society that is averse to the wholesale import of labor, Japan too is starting to change (Douglass and Roberts 2000; Kee and Yoshimatsu 2009). In the 1980s, when visa requirements were relaxed, large numbers of migrants came in from countries like Iran and Bangladesh, and these were followed by Latin Americans of Japanese descent, and more recently by mainland Chinese who have now overtaken the Koreans as the largest group of foreigners in Japan. Supplies of labor to construction sites are generally controlled by the *yakuza*, which often prefers foreign migrants to local casual laborers because they are younger, healthier and stronger. The result has been increasing poverty and homelessness among local casual laborers, as documented in inner city areas in the main urban centers of Japan (Gill 2001). Similarly, Singapore and Malaysia, as the major growth economies in

Southeast Asia, have imported considerable numbers of workers from other ASEAN countries, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines (Eades 2004). Filipino labor is interesting because it is predominantly female, and women from the Philippines have been taking over the role of caring for young children and the elderly in the more developed economies of the region (Parrenas 2001). In Japan, many of them have also entered the country as entertainers to work mainly in the hostess industry, and through that many of them have met and married Japanese men. Whether these marriages are successful or not, the birth of (Japanese) children gives them the right to stay on in Japan, either to organize their own enterprises or to find other husbands. In the 1980s, Philippine women started to move to the rural areas of Japan and Australia where men find it particularly difficult to find wives locally, and this again has turned into a general trend. Women from the poorer ASEAN countries are moving in increasing numbers to Korea and Taiwan as well.

Singapore and Malaysia have tried to control the influx of migrants, resulting in an oscillating policy (Eades 2004). When economic conditions are good, the workers are allowed in, and when the economy moves into recession they start to be laid off, or their contracts are not renewed. After a while governments become aware that there are illegal workers who have remained in the country, so they organize a crackdown. Usually workers are promised an amnesty at first if they are prepared to leave voluntarily, and this is followed by arrests, punishment and forced repatriation—until the economy picks up once more, when the whole cycle starts all over again.

Generally the countries of the region with declining birthrates are most interested in attracting skilled workers, so it is in the unskilled areas of the economy, including construction, that the illegal labor brokers are most active. Countries like Singapore and Australia have long used their successful education industries to attract talent, on the assumption that the students will remain in the country to work once they graduate. Japan is also entering into this market given its overcapacity in higher education, and the government has recently announced moves to try to at least double the number of foreign students in Japanese higher education, such as the Global 30 Program.

The influx of migrants across the region is also leading to more diversity, intermarriage, the formation of ethnic enclaves, and cultural hybridity. It is also raising a number of human rights issues, and forcing governments to adapt their pension and welfare policies for migrants who are increasingly staying for the long term.

Tourism

These patterns in turn are linked to the flows of tourists. Tourism is now one of the largest industries worldwide, and is becoming increasingly diverse. The main attractions are still geographical (ecotourism) and cultural (heritage tourism) in addition to the usual recreational pursuits. Ecotourism can now be subdivided into different genres, including sports tourism (hiking, climbing), and geothermal tourism (volcanoes, hot springs), in addition to just viewing the natural sites (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper, 2009, 2010 (forthcoming)). Similarly, resorts now offer a variety of theme parks in addition to the

traditional beach activities and sports such as golf. There is also a massive events and conventions industry, focusing on large hotels, in addition to recreation.

Two of the most interesting kinds of tourism however, are linked to demographic change. With the low cost of transport and the erosion of welfare entitlements and pensions, many people from the wealthier countries are looking to retire in developing countries, where the climate is warmer and the cost of living is cheaper. Countries such as Malaysia and Thailand, for instance, have been marketing their villas and retirement facilities to retirees in Japan.

As an offshoot of this, countries are now increasingly marketing their medical expertise as well (Cohen and Bodeker 2008; Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper 2009). Countries such as India and Malaysia, which have large numbers of English-speaking doctors, are increasingly exploiting the international market, offering tours including medical treatment or cosmetic surgery, for European, North American and Japanese markets. In addition to top class medical care, the patients can avoid waiting lists, reduce costs, and enjoy the scenery at the same time. This is a market which would have been impossible without the rise of the internet, as the research necessary to track down medical practitioners and hospitals, investigate expertise and comparative costs, and make bookings would have been very time-consuming or impossible before the 1990s. Now thanks to a number of portals available on the net which allow searches for different types of operation and comparisons of costs, all kinds of medical treatment are just a click away (Pease, Cooper and Rowe 2007).

Unfortunately, the internet has allowed less legitimate forms of tourism to flourish as well. Sex tourism has been seen as a major problem since the early 1990s (Eades 2009), due to the coincidence of several factors: the growing spread of the HIV virus in the sex industries of the region, particularly Southeast Asia (e.g. Fordham 2005), the growing concern among feminist groups and other NGOs about the prevalence of human trafficking, particularly of women and girls, the increasing circulation and availability of child pornography, the use of the internet for communication by sexual minorities and subcultures, and the use of the internet for advertising and ordering tourism. Romantic images of the South Pacific in Europe and North America are regularly used in marketing tourism in the region, but the reality is often much less pleasant. The results have been particularly pernicious where small children have become involved in prostitution (Montgomery 2001). Even though some young women who work in the industry have dreams of marrying rich foreigners (Askew 2002), and see it as a source of upward mobility, others remained trapped in poverty or become the victims of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.

Cultural Change and Hybridity

With the high-speed of growth in many of the countries of the region, consumption has become an increasingly important issue. With migration, urbanization and increasing international travel, together with the growth and spread of the media, people's disposable

incomes have increased, and entrepreneurs have devised an endless series of products in addition to basic forms of food, housing and clothing on which they can spend it. The rise of tourism has already been discussed above.

Popular Culture

With the expansion of the middle classes in the Asia Pacific region, and increasing travel between the various countries, popular culture of all kinds has taken off and become one of the main focuses of research in the region, not least due to the long series of monographs edited by Brian Moeran and Lise Skov and published by Curzon (now Routledge Curzon) in London and the University of Hawai'i Press in the United States. Key volumes included Moeran's own monograph on Japanese advertising (1996) and his edited volume on *Asian Media Productions* (2001), but there were also important contributions on many of the other genres of local culture, including the volumes on weddings and *manga* comics cited below.

In the colonial and post-colonial periods, many of the changes taking place in cultural forms were related to the rise of the nation state and nationalism. As Anderson has noted (1991), the rise of modern national consciousness depended on the introduction of modern technology, particularly the high-speed printing press (for producing newspapers) and the railways (for distributing them). Japan was the country in the region which embraced Western culture most enthusiastically in the name of modernization, and even though the main aim was to gain the technology which would protect it from foreign invasion, it adopted many other cultural forms from Europe and North America as well. These ranged from architecture (a spate of European-style brick buildings appearing in Tokyo) (Finn 1995), the education system and sports (baseball made an early appearance) to changes in the constitution and imperial ritual (Fujitani 1998), complete with Western-style uniforms and decorations. The modernizing monarchs of Thailand in the nineteenth century followed suit. Meanwhile, the colonial powers imposed their own cultures on their own colonies, though there were also innovations involving the revival or reinvention of local culture, some of them engineered by foreign scholars and artists, like Walter Spies who helped develop Balinese culture as a resource for the tourist industry in the interwar period (Yamashita 2003).

Local rites of passage, particularly weddings and funerals, have developed into substantial local industries, with people spending large amounts of money on events which are an interesting mixture of cultural forms from East and West (Edwards 1990; Goldstein-Gidoni 1997; Suzuki 2001). After World War II, most cultural influence from outside came from the United States, though in recent years there have been booms in forms such as *manga* comic books (Kinsella 2005) and animated cartoons (*anime*) which originated mainly in Japan, but which have now gone increasingly global (Iwabuchi 2003). More recently, there has been a boom in Korean culture throughout the region, especially television dramas (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008).

Religious Syncretism

Another successful Japanese export to parts of the region has been new religious movements, which became popular in Japan from the early twentieth century onwards. Some, such as the lay Buddhist movement, Soka Gakkai, have substantial presences overseas (Wilson and Machacek 2001), where they fit well with economic growth and modernization in their strong emphasis on ethical behavior and motivation. Other developments in the field of new religious movements have been less benign, producing strange cults, some of them with millennial agendas and a desire to change the world, drawing in equal measure on world religion eschatology and science fiction. The best known of these is probably Aum Shinrikyo founded by Matsumoto Chizuo, alias Asahara Shoko, a half-blind yoga practitioner, in the 1980s (Reader 2000). After an unsuccessful attempt to change the world through politics, Asahara and his followers turned to more drastic methods. They set up laboratories in the foothills of Mt Fuji outside Tokyo, and experimented with the technologies of biological and chemical warfare, including the production of sarin nerve gas. In February 1995, they launched a gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, which killed 12 people and injured thousands of others. The police arrested and put on trial many of the leaders, and some, including Asahara himself, were sentenced to death, but the cult itself was never declared illegal, and continues under a new name with lower profile activities. Unfortunately, the history of Aum has also made it easier for governments in the region to present religious dissent as allied to terrorism, and therefore justify its repression.

Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism

The rise of popular culture, combined with increased mobility and intermarriage, has resulted in the increased importance of cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism throughout the region. The merging of artistic traditions is increasingly common, with *kabuki*-style productions of Western classics, the vogue for Western classical music in the east (where the best performers increasingly tend to come from), and the growth of a multilingual international elite with the circulation and intermarriage of teachers, artists and business personnel from all over the region. This may result from government policies. One of the important educational programs in the region in the last 20 years has been the Japanese government's Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, in which tens of thousands of volunteers have been recruited from abroad to work as assistant language teachers (ALTs) in Japanese government schools (McConnell 2000). Many of them have been inspired by their encounter with Japan to return to work again, in jobs requiring bilingual skills, and a large number have married local partners, resulting in bilingual cosmopolitan families. Despite Japan's supposed cultural isolation, there are a surprising number of international marriages, particularly in the large cities, resulting in these kinds of hybrid families and individuals.

Higher Education

These kinds of cosmopolitans are also important in the internationalization of universities in the region which is now underway, as the major countries in the region compete to become major hubs in the global market for higher education (Eades, Goodman and Hada 2005; Bigalke and Neubauer 2009). This has been stimulated in recent years by the spread of the audit culture, with international rankings looming large in university policy, and research output and performance of institutions increasingly dominating systems of government subsidies and funding. The more a university can produce research output that can be evaluated internationally (and therefore most likely written in English), the more research funding and the more students it is able to attract. Japan has one of the largest higher education sectors in the region, but it has a major language problem in that most Japanese academics outside the natural sciences tend to publish in Japanese. Not surprisingly, the highest ranked universities in the region are generally in the Anglophone countries and regions, most notably Singapore, Hong Kong and, above all, Australia, where education is one of the country's largest and most successful exports. Other countries in the region are trying to compete as well, offering bilingual education, dual degrees and exchange programs with universities both in and outside the region. Marketing higher education internationally is itself becoming a major industry, as is locating jobs for graduates that can make use of their multilingual and multicultural skills. With the reduction in the birthrate, an increasing percentage of children are now graduating from high schools and moving on to university, and therefore making use of opportunities for study abroad. With increasing competition in the sector, the degree of hybridity and the number of cultural cosmopolitans seems set to increase—providing an increasing platform for the kind of regional cooperation and integration which Castells (1998) predicted in his analysis of the eroding boundaries of the state.

Future Issues and Unfinished Business

One thing which has become very clear to us in writing this article is that the most useful and illuminating academic work on the region is nearly always multidisciplinary, drawing on a range of theories and methods. Analysis using a single narrowly defined theoretical or methodological perspective is often both highly technical for the non-specialist and ignorant of a large part of the reality on the ground. One reason for launching this journal is the hope of encouraging interdisciplinary work accessible to a wide range of regional specialists, and which can provide comparative insights into the nature of the processes and changes taking place across the region as a whole.

The issues discussed above reflect a cross-section of the current literature and research on the Asia Pacific region and suggest possible trajectories for the future. In part, these will depend on macro-level geographical factors such as climate change and resource availability, as well as the continuing globalization of the world economy. Even if the

current concerns about climate change turn out to be premature, they will at least have encouraged some Asia Pacific countries to begin reducing their energy needs, their population growth, their levels of environmental pollution, particularly of air and water, and their reliance on dwindling oil supplies from faraway parts of the world which are less than politically stable. All that will be positive, as will be increasing regional cooperation, movements of people to bridge the demographic imbalances now opening up, and growing cosmopolitanism and tolerance of diversity. However, if the results of climate change, together with increasing population pressure become increasingly severe, it could well be that virulent nationalism will resurface. Then the solution of problems and the distribution of resources will be seen as zero-sum games, and many of the positive signs of regional cooperation in the last few years will go into reverse.

Effective political leadership in the region will be of the utmost importance in the next few years. For a short while after US President Obama's 2008 inauguration it looked as if the United States was for once willing to engage both with burgeoning social problems at home and with the international community for joint solutions of global problems. Unfortunately, there are signs that things are rapidly returning to 'Business as Usual.' American conservatism is reasserting itself under the banners of opposition to Big Government (symbolized by the bank bailouts and the health reforms), preserving jobs in America (symbolized by critiques of Chinese fiscal policy and their maintenance of a low value for the yuan), and the United States as Global Supercop engaging in megaphone diplomacy, apparently unmindful of the problems that have resulted from having played this role already.

Defining global problems such as population pressure, energy supplies, and food shortages as security threats to the nation state, to be countered by spending more on the military, is a strategy which could become increasingly counterproductive if some of the more dramatic scenarios of the effects of climate change turn out to be true. Once increasing numbers of environmental refugees are on the move, it would make more sense to try and deal with these problems on a regional, if not a global scale, so that at least they have somewhere within the region to which they can move. Pacific Islanders are few in number and can be easily assimilated by countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the European Union if the need arises. If much larger populations were to start moving in the Asian mainland, e.g. from densely populated regions running out of water, or from river deltas and megacities facing inundation, that would be a much more serious problem and one which would be difficult to solve just by building bigger and better frontier walls. Whether the new sense of global and regional community currently being constructed with the help of information technology, media and the increasing economic strength of the region can help overcome these kinds of divisions, or whether it will be a victim of resurgent nationalism born out of population pressure and increasing scarcity of resources, may well turn out to be the most important question of all in the Asia Pacific of the twenty-first century.

Note

1. See the discussions in e.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacial_lake_outburst_flood, http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2002/issue3/0302p48_glacial_lakes_flood_threat.html.

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