

Japan in a Dynamic Asia: Coping with the New Security Challenges.
Edited by Yoichiro Sato and Satu Limaye. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006. Softcover: 271pp.

Japan's increasing activism in international politics presents puzzles about the source of changes in Japanese foreign policy. Japan in a Dynamic Asia offers a fresh and insightful look at the changes from the perspective of Japan's relations with individual Asian countries and sub-regions, instead of focusing on the Japan-US alliance as we used to do. Since Chalmers Johnson's "Japan in Search of a 'Normal' Role" was published 15 years ago, most attention has been on how the anachronisms in the Japan-U.S. alliance could be transformed after the Cold War to make Japan a "normal" state in world affairs. Few scholars have pursued the issue from the angle of Japan's relations with its Asian neighbours. However, with rapidly rising China and India in the region, a nuclear-ambitious North Korea, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and growing transnational non-traditional security threats, Japan's foreign policy environment has undergone enormous changes since the end of the Cold War. The new and more dynamic regional environment warrants a reconsideration of the centrality of the United States in Japan's foreign policy calculations. It calls for more attention to the study of the role of regionalism and Japan's bilateral relations with key Asian neighbours in its overall foreign policy posture, an area that has been long under-researched. The edited volume under review here came at a right time to fill the gap.

During the Cold War, the Japan-US alliance set the framework within which Tokyo conducted its foreign policy. Japan's foreign policy had only a limited space of manoeuvrability in pursuit of its own interests. The major contradiction of Japan's foreign policy, as Yoichiro Sato (one of the editors of this volume) points out, was a heavy dependence on Washington for security on the one hand and the consequent separation of itself from natural markets and neighbours in Asia on the other. This policy contradiction made Japan vulnerable to changes in Asia as well as any changes in US policy. To be a more "normalized" state, Japanese elites have realized that the alliance with Washington should not present an "either-or" choice for Japan's foreign policy (Sato, p. 12). Tokyo should have more diversified security arrangements — bilateral and multilateral — in the region. It is from this point of view that the study of Japan's current bilateral relations in Asia, as shown in this volume, gives us a more concrete feel of how Tokyo proceeds with "normalization" of its foreign and security policy after the Cold War.

The edited volume has assembled an impressive array of articles about Japan's important bilateral relations in Asia with a focus on how regional attributes and bilateral relationship have contributed to Japan's search of a more "normal" role in the region. While the role of the United States in the form of the Japan-US alliance is still and will remain the cornerstone in Japan's foreign policy, how have its bilateral relations and regional arrangements changed Japan's foreign policy calculus and posture? Similarly, looking at Japan's bilateral relations in Asia, how has Tokyo's close alliance with the United States affected its bilateral relations with key Asian neighbours one way or another? The authors seem to be in agreement that Japan should seek regionalism and bilateralism with non-US regional partners, and its Asian endeavours would supplement shortcomings of the Japan-US alliance, not replace it. In discussion of its foreign policy transformation, authors of several chapters also note the revival of centralized control and mobility in the policy-making process, following the strong leadership of the Koizumi administration, which has enhanced the role of the prime minister's office in decision making.

The book contains 12 chapters in all. In addition to an introductory and a concluding chapter, there is one chapter on the historical background, one about regional trade arrangement, and eight chapters discuss Japan's most important bilateral relationships in Asia. These country chapters cover Japan's relations with China, Russia, the two Koreas, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, Australia, and India. All chapter authors address a similar set of questions, that is, as Japan attempts to solidify its US alliance, how does it balance its own interest in Asia? How do other countries respond to Japan's role in Asia and what kind of role do they expect Japan to play in the region and in what manner?

The volume is a worthwhile acquisition for anyone who is interested in post-Cold War Asian international relations in general, and the transformation of Japanese foreign policy in particular. In addition to some general constraints Japan has regarding its relations with Asia, such as its own ambivalence about Asian regionalism, domestic politics, its alliance with the United States, and its relative economic decline vis-à-vis a rising China, the volume provides readers a more in-depth examination of how Tokyo balances different push and pull in normalizing its role in the region, especially between security and economic interests, and between Washington and its Asian neighbours.

In the country chapters, authors identify specific problems Japan faces in playing a more "normalized" role in Asia as well. For

example, in the China chapter Denny Roy recognizes some deeper structural factors such as the “history issue” and Sino-Japanese geopolitical rivalry in Asia that have restrained Japan’s activism in Asia. Apart from the structural problems, the rise of nationalism in both China and Japan has compounded the difficulty in achieving any meaningful reconciliation between the two countries about their past. In the Chinese and Japanese societies, those born after World War II have different attitudes towards the “history issue”, which has led to continuous bilateral suspicion and even enmity between the two countries (Roy, p. 69). In the case of its relations with South Korea, despite consistent efforts to consolidate the relationship, the similar “history issue” and the differing perspectives over the future of the Korean peninsula continue to shadow the bilateral relationship. As Seongho Sheen argues, the two countries face tough challenges from issues in the past, present, and future: disputes over history, North Korea, Japan’s military role, and the FTA negotiation (Sheen, p. 117). Japan’s reaching out to Southeast Asia, India, Australia in some way helps to relieve its less enthusiastic reception in regional multilateral activities. In that sense, the volume provides us with a good update about the source of Japan’s increasing activism in recent years and the problems it faces in the context of the new regional power balance and security concerns.

Most edited collections are usually created by colleagues who are intrigued by common questions and then organize conferences or research projects to study the questions. A collected volume is later published with the contributions by these conference participants. Although the editors provide no hints that might give readers some sense of where the collection came from, all contributions to this volume, written mostly by scholars working at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, are well researched and organized. Written from a unique angle of studying Japanese foreign policy, the volume deserves wide readership among students not only of Japanese foreign relations but also of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

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