

**Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska**

University of Lodz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0938-5771>

## Introduction

Asia, the largest continent in the world, holds a pivotal position as a global crossroad, connecting various regions and playing a crucial role in international trade and shipping. Its vast landmass and expansive coastline make it an essential hub for economic activities and a strategic link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The growing economic and military power of Asian nations has resulted in heightened competition for influence on political and economic issues, significantly impacting global security and stability.

In recent years, the entire Asian continent has experienced a notable re-evaluation of its standing in global affairs. While previously considered primarily as a recipient or observer, Asia is increasingly recognized as a central player shaping regional and global dynamics. This transformation is evident across various international organizations, where Asian countries are actively engaging in decision-making processes and contributing to regional cooperation and integration.

Among these organizations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plays a critical role in promoting unity and addressing common challenges across the diverse – especially Southeast – Asian nations. Additionally, other regional bodies and initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), highlight Asia's multifaceted engagement in shaping regional and global agendas.

Asia's strategic location has made it the focus of global attention, particularly due to territorial disputes and the influence of powers such as China and Japan. The South China Sea territorial disputes, in particular, have garnered significant international interest, reflecting the broader

geopolitical competition in the region. China's rising economic and military power has led to increased competition for influence with the United States, while Japan has been actively strengthening political and economic ties with Asian nations as part of its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy.

Moreover, Asia is also confronted with several ongoing conflicts and challenges. For instance, it faces separatist movements in places like Myanmar and southern Thailand, as well as humanitarian crises such as the Rohingya refugee situation. These issues have far-reaching implications for regional stability and have attracted attention from the international community.

The reconsideration of Asia's role in international relations stems from its growing economic and political importance, vibrant societies, and strategic location. As Asia continues to play a central role in shaping regional and global dynamics, it becomes increasingly imperative for the international community to consider its interests and perspectives in its engagement with the region.

Taking these diverse factors into account, the authors of this publication have delved into the changing political, economic, and social dynamics across the Asian region. The monograph primarily focuses on analyzing the redistribution of power in 21st-century Asia and its implications for the development of relations between Asian and European countries. By examining the evolving perceptions of Asian countries and the challenges they face, this publication aims to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of Asia's role in the global arena.

The monograph is composed of four thematic blocks. The first part analyses the international discussions on security issues in Southeast Asia. David Arthur Jones raises the topic of the endless rivalry of powers in the SEA region. The author points out that today we are witnessing a changing balance of power, because both militarily and economically, this region is characterized by great interest from the old and new, Asian, American, and European powers. The author wonders whether in the current situation it is possible to bring Western countries closer to China, and what would be the consequences. Adrian Rafał Szumowski analyses the development of sea power-related tools and strategies that have been created to manage and use during stalemate and potential conflict in the region. The author emphasizes the specificity of Southeast Asia for the deployment of naval forces, and shows the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of the region and their importance for

building maritime power. He explores potential changes in naval power strategies and tools and outlines scenarios for the future. The topic of security in SEA is also dealt with by Anna Voloshina, who discusses the issue of Taiwan. The author presents the crisis situations that took place in the Taiwan Strait over the first two decades of the 21st century and indicates that in recent years the situation around Taiwan has been moving towards increased turbulence. The text discusses the key factors that have a destabilizing effect on the relations between the three main players – Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, and the United States.

The second thematic block of this book relates to historical, economical, and social issues. The chapter prepared by Bart Dessen raises the problem of historical analysis of China’s cultural influence in the region of today’s Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) and in the Xinjiang autonomous region. Using historical texts, the author examines the strategy of successive Chinese authorities in relation to Central Asia. The author points to the importance of building, also metaphorically, the Great Wall and emphasizes the contemporary status of the development of economic and political relations between China and the countries of the region. An interesting comparative analysis is also presented in the text prepared by Michał Lubina. The author focuses on contemporary Myanmar and its long-time leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Her political achievements, however, are subjected to exegesis, taking into account the achievements and legacy of her important Burmese predecessors – especially U Thant. Economic issues are raised in the text written by Elżbieta Majchrowska. She looks at the increasing role of regional organizations in response to the declining role of the World Trade Organisation. The author believes that, in particular, the European Union is interested in maintaining lively economic relations with the countries of Asia and the Pacific. The text presents moreover a synthetic analysis of the agreements already concluded between the EU and individual ASEAN member states or the status of negotiations of agreements. This theme is continued by Burcu Ermeýdan. The content of her chapter also concerns free trade agreements. The author points out that in Asia and the Pacific there is no single regional organization covering all the countries of the region, which results in the creation of the so-called “overlapping regionalism” paradox, meaning a situation with many fragmented regional groups, most of which geographically overlap due to multi-membership. The author outlines an analytical framework for the study of overlapping regionalism, presents specific examples

and critically examines the determinants of the emergence of these initiatives in the East Asian context. The next chapter by David Arthur Jones presents the relevant issue of sports diplomacy, and specifically the importance of the rivalry of countries on the Olympic arena. The author asks a number of questions, including the ones regarding the goals of the Olympics (i.e., sports, media, political or financial), concerning the significance of sanctions applied to countries but also to specific athletes, as well as relating to appearing under a “false flag” by taking advantage of the possibility of adopting different citizenships. An attractive research perspective is also presented by Elena Burova, who analyses the agricultural market in countries located in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The author shows what agricultural evolution this region has undergone in recent years and what opportunities and challenges it faces in the coming time.

The third thematic part of this monograph focuses on the position of Japan and its historical and contemporary questions. The text prepared by Karol Żakowski analyses the process of dialogue between Japan and the countries of the SEA region. It points to the international and domestic factors behind Japan’s rapprochement with countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. The author claims that a deep reconciliation with ASEAN countries was a part of Japan’s foreign policy strategy. In the next chapter, Maciej Pletnia discusses the use of game theory to investigate the decision-making process. The starting point is the analysis of the visits of Japanese prime ministers to the Yasukuni shrine. The idea of the text is to construct a model enabling the evaluation of previous visits to the sanctuary and the assessment of the likelihood of such visits in the future. The author considers that the use of game theory allows for a better understanding of rationality in the analysis of visits to the Yasukuni shrine. In contrast, Zachariasz Popiołek deals with the unique issue of Koenkai – an individual support group for Japanese politicians. The author presents the historical development of individual support groups, makes a detailed analysis of public opinion polls and financial reports, and as a result, tries to answer the question whether the function of distribution of Koenkai funds postulated in the scientific literature remains valid. The next chapter is prepared by Clémence Schantz and Pascale Hancart Petitet. The authors discuss the issue of prenatal care conditions, maternal health issues as well as birth ideologies and practices in Japan and SEA countries. They indicate that in the countries of Southeast Asia there is a broad discussion regarding the humanitarianization of childbirth. The text, based on many years of

ethnographic research, discusses political, cultural, and social controversies by analysing reproductive health initiatives implemented as part of Japanese cooperation with Southeast Asia. The final text in this section addresses the issue of violence and ontological security. Edoardo Pieroni discusses the Japanese religious ethos and shows how the normative framework that underlies it contradicts the individualistic principle on which the humanitarian interventionism of Western countries is based. The text presents ontological theories of security in international relations and analyses their applicability to the case of Japan and its controversial approach to humanitarian intervention.

The last section in this book focuses on the relations between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and countries in Asia. Lukáš Laš conducts a thorough review of diplomatic missions between the countries forming the Visegrad Initiative (V4) and countries belonging to ASEAN. The author paints a picture of political, economic, and cultural interactions between the countries of both regions on the vertical and horizontal level, looking for opportunities for the development of their interactions in the future. On the other hand, the text by Bartosz Kowalski in a synthetic way presents an interesting case study of the relationship between the University of Łódź in Poland and educational and scientific partners in China. The analysis shows that the quality and intensity of contacts did not depend so much on the involvement of academic entities but was largely determined by political relations between Poland and China.

This publication is of a scientific nature, although some chapters are of a research nature and others are more analytical. The book attempts to synthesise the current challenges and conditions highlighting the importance of Asia in world politics and in the policies of regional powers. Due to the many threads it deals with, several important research hypotheses can be found in the text. They focus on the following points:

- The growing economic and military power of Asian nations has resulted in increased competition for influence on political and economic issues, impacting global security and stability.
- The re-evaluation of Asia's role in global affairs has led to its recognition as a central player in shaping regional and global dynamics.
- Regional organizations like ASEAN play a critical role in promoting regional cooperation and integration in Asia.
- The territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the influence of major global powers in Asia, such as China, the United States, and Japan, have heightened geopolitical competition in the region.

- Asia's strategic location, vibrant societies, growing economic and political importance contribute to its evolving role in international relations.

These hypotheses provide a basis for further investigation and analysis of the changing dynamics in Asia and its implications for regional and global interactions.

The methodology employed in this publication encompasses a range of research methods and data collection techniques. To analyze the changing political, economic, and social dynamics in the Asian continent and the implications for Asian-European relations, a comprehensive research approach was adopted, including:

- literature review – a thorough review of existing literature on Asian politics, economics, and social trends was conducted by all the authors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This involved reviewing scholarly articles, books, reports, and other relevant publications;

- data collection – quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a holistic analysis. Statistical data, such as trade figures, economic indicators, and demographic information, were obtained from reliable databases and official sources. Qualitative data, including expert opinions, and case studies, were also incorporated to capture nuanced perspectives and insights;

- case studies – in-depth case studies were conducted on selected countries and specific issues within the Asian continent. These case studies provided valuable contextual information and allowed for a deeper exploration of key dynamics and their implications. Primary and secondary sources were utilized to gather data for the case studies, including government reports, academic studies, and media sources;

- comparative analysis – comparative analysis was employed to identify commonalities, differences, and patterns across various Asian countries and their interactions with European counterparts. This approach facilitated the examination of regional dynamics and the impact of different factors on international relations;

- interdisciplinary perspective – to capture the multidimensional nature of the subject, an interdisciplinary perspective was adopted. Drawing from fields such as political science, economics, sociology, and international relations, this approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the changing dynamics in Asia.

The combination of these research methods and approaches provided a robust foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of Asia's

role in global affairs and the implications for Asian-European relations. By employing mixed methodology, this publication aims therefore to offer an insightful and well-rounded analysis of the subject matter.

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At this point, I would like to thank the authors of all the chapters whose efforts have contributed to this publication, which is an important input to the interdisciplinary debate on the political, economic, and social situation in Asian countries and presents the status of these countries' relations with European partners. I believe that this book will contribute to strengthening the discussion on current developments in Southeast Asia and their impact on the international scene.