

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**ON**  
**THE MAKING OF NORTHEAST ASIA**

BY KENT CALDER, MIN YE

When working in a team, we must have heard the adage "When we work together, we are stronger and better" a thousand times. This phrase accurately characterizes the position of Northeast Asian countries, where the interests of three major nuclear powers and the world's three largest economies converge around the volatile pivot of the Korean peninsula. According to Kent and Min, Northeast Asia has the potential to revolutionize the world, but there are barriers between these countries that hinder them from collaborating and cooperating. The authors go deeper into the conditions and reasons that led to the formation of the north-east region as a regional and worldwide affair and organization in this book.

Kent and Min examined the different factors that are causing rifts amongst these countries, namely Korea, Japan, and China, but they also explored the various reasons why these countries should remain together, some of which are as follows: -

- i. The Northeast area is by far the largest economically and militarily and technologically in the entire East Asian region.
- ii. The future connection of the Northeast Asians is a major uncertainty for the United States and the rest of the globe, giving considerably greater long-term geopolitical relevance to the intricacies of conflict and cooperation among them than is commonly recognized.
- iii. Over the last decade, intraregional ties have grown more intense and dynamic.
- iv. Northeast Asia, like Southeast Asia in the 1970s, is on the verge of momentous geopolitical transformation.

Since World War II, divides over the 38th parallel, between China and Japan, have been significantly stronger than any centripetal force. According to Kent Calder and Min Ye, this is changing. Since the 1990s, the previously disparate north-east Asian nations have become steadily more interdependent, connected, and cohesive in socioeconomic terms, owing in large part to increased trade, intergovernmental change, intensified investment and trade, a strong trend toward regionalization, increased pop culture, and transnational entertainment. As a result, the long-standing "organisational gap" in Northeast Asia, as well as the limits of historical hatred and geopolitical distrust, are progressively diminishing. In 1960, these Northeast Asian economies accounted for barely 4% of global GDP, compared to 37% for the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Northeast Asia accounted for 17.7 percent of global GDP in 2008, compared to 22.4% for the European Union and 27.6% for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

This book explores numerous incidents, situations, and conditions that led to many disparities between these nations, as well as the various factors that are presently leading to the gap being closed. It highlights how the connection between Tokyo and Seoul is strengthening, how the

relationship between Taiwan and Japan is improving, and how the deeper rapprochement is one of the grounds for north-east integration. The ever-increasing antagonism between mainland China and Taiwan is likewise fading, as is mainland Chinese investment in Taiwan. Though the relationship between all of these nations is improving for various reasons and there is optimism that they will all work together, the reconciliation between north and south Korea is far more difficult than that between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. china.

The book goes on to analyze the many internal development obstacles that these north-east Asian nations face, and we can deduce that the primary two issues that all northeast Asian countries confront are-

- a. Energy Insecurities.
- b. Financial Weaknesses

All of these challenges, which are emerging in the context of increasing regional interdependence, necessitate and demand regional coordination. Though we discussed how the relationship between these countries is improving, the persistent organizational gap within the region, resulting from a century of military conflict and mutual sociopolitical estrangement, makes it institutionally difficult to meet that demand. Other common regional issues, such as infrastructure development and environmental degradation, exacerbate the all-too-often unfulfilled need for collective action. This book discusses the various regional institution-building that has significantly increased in the last decade to meet urgent regional needs. Only seven new regional institutions were established in the four-decade period from 1950 to 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell, while in the short fifteen years from 1990 to 2005, the number nearly tripled to twenty in East Asia. However, the organization gap remains much more pronounced than in Asia's southeast quadrant.

Local, business, and epistemic links among northeast Asian partners have persisted in strengthening despite political obstacles at the national and regional levels complicating formal diplomatic connections, even if there have been issues on the higher and diplomatic level in these nations. Local government networks became more intricate throughout time, and multinational firms expanded globally despite and occasionally as a result of political unpredictability. Thus, relationships within the Northeast Asian subregion are extremely dynamic and constantly changing. Despite the common misconception that such organisations are mostly found in Asia, more formal trilateral institutions are also fast forming. Summits between senior bureaucrats and top political figures from Japan, China, and South Korea have become more common on a national level. Major strides have also been made in top-level bilateral ties between Japan and Korea and China since 2006. Regional tensions have greatly decreased, and cooperation has gotten even stronger as a result of new leadership in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan late in 2009.

This book goes deeper into the general scholarly pessimism towards regionalism in northeast Asia. It discusses how the majority of the literature on Asian regionalism has focused on Southeast Asian or Asia-wide institutions, mainly ignoring the above-mentioned historic new regionalization movements in Northeast Asia. The common thinking, which reflects the long-standing tensions between China, Japan, and Korea or across the Taiwan Strait, has long been noticeably gloomy about possibilities for multilateral cooperation. 60 This literature claimed that the conflict-ridden Northeast's structural, institutional, and cultural characteristics are simply not favourable to interregional cooperation. According to Min Ye and Cader, the

Northeast Asian subregion, which includes China, Korea, and Japan, looks to prioritise its connection with the United States over intraregional ties. According to many, the U.S.-Japan alliance connection is strong and is escalating Sino-Japanese tensions. It is asserted that even China views its bilateral relations with the United States as being of the utmost strategic and economic importance. In fact, Beijing initiated a bold new strategic engagement with Washington in the summer of 2005, a move that had never before been made in the country's relations with other Asian nations.

Using a critical-juncture approach, Kent Calder and Min Ye first offer a different explanation for the organisation gap in Asia between the conclusion of World War II and the 1997 Asian financial crisis. As will be seen later, the pivotal moment of the Korean War gave rise to an unusual and tragic "hub-and-spokes" alliance between the United States and its allies in Japan and Korea, with China joining later as an odd de facto member. For four long decades, the American allies in Asia were ensnared, albeit frequently benevolently, in this hierarchical structure, conducting most of their intraregional interactions through the Washington hub of the system. In Northeast Asia, where harsh, long-standing historical memories frequently exacerbated Cold War estrangement among the Northeast Asian governments, "spokes to spokes" ties were both scarce and precarious. The crisis signified a new turning point in the East Asian region's integration, which the authors address in depth in Chapter 4. The crisis of 1977 is discussed in the chapter as it contributed to the creation of new policy networks. The book discusses how these police ultimately assisted in overcoming historical estrangement and isolation, which were particularly pronounced between Japan and its closest neighbours. This accelerated the formation of north east Asia in subsequent years.

The emergent subregional integrating mechanism, created in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, is discussed in the next two chapters. The chapters explain how, after lying dormant for more than 50 years, visions of a shared northeast Asian identity with good historical foundations hidden by painful memories of war and colonialism have reemerged. Following the 1997–1998 financial crisis, which left the north-eastern quadrant of Asia relatively more vigorous than its south-eastern counterpart—and headed toward greater cohesion, even as it paid lip service to broader regional conceptions in a multitiered international system—those visions gained renewed life and credibility. Beyond these overarching principles, the author concentrates in Chapters 7–10 on detailed country-specific analyses. Since the Asian financial crisis, regional policy in China, South Korea, and to a lesser extent Japan have significantly changed, enabling each country to overcome a history of estrangement from its immediate neighbours and to take advantage of latent mutual complementarity. As resentful memories fade and reliance increases, domestic politics of regionalism have undergone significant shift in each country, with "regionalizing coalitions" reviving long-standing ties with close neighbours.

This book considers conflicting intra-Asian tendencies as well as cooperative trans-Pacific relations. Nonetheless, it deviates from common pessimism about Northeast Asian regionalism to describe a more vibrant, if still dimly recognised, new reality. That is the Making of Northeast Asia: a socioeconomic phenomenon that is becoming increasingly political and diplomatic, with long-term strategic ramifications. The book concludes by evaluating America's historical attitude to Northeast Asia, its shifting political-economic links with the region, and the policy ramifications. Since World War II, the United States—a geographical neighbour to Northeast Asia—has been a vital regional actor—a "resident power," in the words of U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates<sup>66</sup>—with deep political-military roots in the western Pacific. Both Japan and South Korea have mutual security treaties with the US, host American

facilities, and see the US as a significant export market. The economic allure of the United States is felt by both Mainland China and Taiwan. Nonetheless, despite its enormous embedded leverage in the region, America appears to be surprisingly oblivious to Northeast Asia's emerging domestic political-economic tendencies.