
China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations

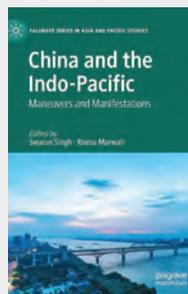
Edited by Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah
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In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the Indo-Pacific has become a key arena for competition between the U.S. and China. This competition has led to the emergence of various regional cooperation frameworks and competing narratives aimed at either containing China and maintaining American hegemony or shaping the region in China's favor. *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations* is a volume edited by Swaran Singh from Jawaharlal Nehru University and Reena Marwah from Delhi University that delves into the aforementioned subjects, hence shedding light on the idiosyncrasies of this great power rivalry.

This volume was published following a two-day International Conference held in April 2021. Even though the editors briefly mention the selection process of the articles, they keep the readers in the dark regarding the details about the conference, including its name, scope, and objectives. Adding this information would have significantly helped to understand the purpose behind production of the book. The volume begins with an introductory chapter authored by the editors, which offers an overview of China's regional engagement. 10 subsequent chapters follow this introduction.

In chapter 2, Dattesh D. Parulekar examines the "Sovereign Strategic Networks" in the Indo-Pacific, highlighting their role in shap-



ing interactions with China through alternative narratives and norms. Parulekar emphasizes the rise of regional powers, which seek flexible cooperation models over rigid institutionalized structures, hence providing valuable insights into alignment-making dynamics in the region. Overall, the chapter offers a detailed examination of the region's changing security landscape, with a special emphasis on China's rise and the ramifications this carries.

In chapter 3, Rubina Waseem touches upon the U.S.-China strategic competition using the framework of theoretical discourses on the complex interdependence between the two countries. By doing so, Waseem examines the interplay between economic and security dynamics in the region from both realist and liberal perspectives. The author stresses that the U.S. is committed to developing new strategies to maintain its leadership through collaboration rather than coercion. Hence, it undertakes steps to contain China on the one hand while engaging with it on the other. While Waseem's analysis is comprehensive, it occasionally oversimplifies the nuances of U.S.-China relations in the broader Indo-Pacific security landscape.

Chapter 4, by Stephen R. Nagy, delves into Sino-Japanese relations, tracing their evolution from the post-Second World War era to the present. The author argues that in the face

of China's rise, Tokyo wants to ensure it interlocks itself in the regional political economy by constructing and participating in various multilateral frameworks (p. 67). Nagy provides a holistic view of Sino-Japanese relations and points out the triggering factors for their changing trajectory.

Chapter 5, by Don McLain Gill, explores the ASEAN's role as a normative power and its efforts to do the balancing act between China and the U.S. He highlights ASEAN's attempt to balance between the two powers through initiatives like the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). By touching upon the ideological underpinning of ASEAN, its internal conflicts and China's occasional economic coercion of its member-states, the author provides valuable insights into ASEAN's functionality, scrutinizing its grand strategy and potential obstacles to its implementation.

Similarly, in chapter 6, the volume examines the European Union's perspective on Indo-Pacific affairs authored by Claudia Astarita. Astarita argues that the EU is striving to establish itself as a significant player in the region, referring to its adoption of an Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2021 (p. 93). However, she points out ambiguities in the strategy regarding the positioning of China and the role of the U.S. Additionally, Astarita emphasizes the lack of consensus among European stakeholders. This lack of coherence mirrors the challenges faced by ASEAN, highlighting the difficulty in establishing clear stances and producing coherent narratives. The chapter effectively underscores internal disagreements within the EU, contributing to confusion in Beijing about how to engage with the entity.

Chapter 7, by Artyom A. Garin, explores Australia's perspective on multilateralism and China within the context of the Sino-Ameri-

can rivalry. Garin highlights Canberra's dual relationship with Washington as a security partner and with Beijing as its major trade partner. The author effectively elucidates Australia's approach to China's rise and multilateral cooperation, employing the concept of "middle power" to clarify Canberra's stance on regional issues (p. 122).

In chapter 8, Devendra Kumar Bishnoi explores the contrasting narratives shaping the region's ideological landscape. Bishnoi identifies two primary narratives: the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) championed by the U.S. and its allies, and the China's Community of Shared Future (CSF). He traces the evolution of the CSF from China's economic ascent, in the 1990s, to its engraving in the Chinese constitution in 2017 (p. 156). Bishnoi outlines key elements of the CSF vision and its wider scope that encapsulates both maritime and continental Asia. Bishnoi provides a valuable contribution by addressing the gap in academic literature regarding alternative ideological narratives. By doing so, Bishnoi enables readers to comprehend the dynamics at play in the region from a holistic perspective.

In chapter 9, Mrityika Guha Sarkar elaborates on the Quad –the grouping of the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India– that advocates for the vision of FOIP. Sarkar suggests that the Quad has the potential to counterbalance China's CSF vision. To support her argument, she refers to Quad members' Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) aimed at reducing reliance on China-dominated supply chains and their vaccine diplomacy through the Quad Vaccine Partnership (p. 179, pp. 185-186). While the chapter's main argument can be contested, the Quad's efforts to strike a balance are evident. However, achieving this balance would require increased coordination, consensus, and commitment among Quad

members, which is hardly feasible given their intense economic dependence on China.

In chapter 10, Madhura Bane highlights China's active involvement in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), through which it has partially succeeded in replacing Western influence. Bane successfully outlines the PICs' historical significance, stressing their geopolitical importance and vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of China's engagement, regional responses, and the impact of geopolitical competition on the PICs would further enrich this piece.

In chapter 11, Reena Marwah and Abhishek Verma assess China's engagements with South Asian states and the rivalry for influence between Beijing and New Delhi. The authors illustrate how the internal dynamics of South Asian states shape their interactions with China and India, often creating an anti/pro-China or anti/pro-India stance within their internal political landscapes. While the chapter's broad scope covers China's engagement with numerous South Asian states, it sometimes lacks depth in discussion. Nonetheless, the authors effectively present the domestic dynamics of South Asian states and their role in shaping their foreign policy directions.

China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations is the volume that provides the

readers with an all-encompassing view of the state of the art in the Indo-Pacific region. It entails a wide range of perspectives, including those of global powers, regional ones and even those of island nations. However, despite the width of its scope, it omits China's interactions with some vital parts of Asia, such as Russia and Central Asia; which would further enrich this volume.

While the case selection of the book is comprehensive in its coverage and intense in its analysis, the sequence of the cases could be improved. To elaborate, pieces touching upon the ideological underpinning of Chinese and American regional policies i.e., chapters 8 and 9, could precede those elaborating on specific country-based cases. This would introduce the readers without a strong background in the regional studies with the dynamics at play in the region, prior to exposing them to more scrupulous country-specific examinations.

Overall, the volume succeeds in familiarizing the readers with the conceptual tool-set needed to comprehend Asian affairs and can be beneficial for both students of Asian studies and the readers without a strong regional expertise alike. The comprehensive coverage of the book enables audiences of various academic backgrounds to gain knowledge on contemporary regional affairs and the region's modern historical outlook.