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Perceptions and Images of China

Neue China-Studien, Bd. 2; Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008, 298 pp;
EUR 39,00; ISBN 978-3-8329-3459-0

Hans J Giessman (Ed.)

**Security Handbook 2008, Emerging Powers in East Asia: China, Russia and India,
Local Conflicts and Regional Security Building in Asia's Northeast**

Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008, 256 pp, paperback; EUR 44,00;
ISBN 978-3-8329-3378-4

Asia, especially East Asia, has begun to stir again, not as an epicentre of political revolution, as with India's new-found independence in 1947, the communists' ascent to power after almost half a decade of civil war on the Chinese mainland or the North's final victory in the Vietnam War. Asia is now taking shape as a centre of economic gravity, with the "emerging" giants of China and India placing their weight beside that of Japan, today still the world's second largest economy. December 2008 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the XIIIth Congress of the Communist Party of China, when Deng Xiaoping succeeded in cementing a new departure, already initiated earlier through reforms dismantling Mao Zedong's people's communes in the countryside, which would see 'Red China' jettisoning the heavily destructive voluntarism of the Great Helmsman in favour of a course of economic reconstruction based on progressive, if often groping, strengthening of market mechanisms and – crucially – on economic co-operation with the capitalist countries no longer seen as adversaries in a contest of world revolution but as sources of technology, managerial know-how and – increasingly – as markets for the manufactures of a China turned "workshop of the world". In foreign relations, Peking's earlier rapprochement with the US against the background of Washington's Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union and the latter-day schism between the two communist pretenders in Moscow and Peking speedily broadened into China's active participation in international affairs as an indispensable complement to the country's growing global economic ties and interests.

Re-emerging China's bulk could not fail to loom large on the world stage, and Peking's perception of foreign anxiety about "China's peaceful rise" caused official parlance to plump for a time for the seemingly more innocuous "peaceful development". These semantic contortions indicate a simple fact: China's impressively successful reforms remain accompanied by the need for further efforts to establish the country's place as a stakeholder in international relations, particularly in view of the diplomatic landscape of Asia which continues to include potentially eruptive sutures such as the Korean Peninsula, conflicting maritime territorial claims, the stand-off across the Taiwan Strait and – farther afield – the tense relationship between India and Pakistan, China's "all-weather ally", or an Afghanistan riven by internal violence.

All national policy carries historical baggage and its inner dynamics often are not readily apparent; China is no exception: The Celestial Empire's profound discomfiture in the wake of the First Opium War with the United Kingdom (1840-42) and the ravages of internal disintegration and foreign (Japanese) aggression in the decades of 1911 to 1949 form the backdrop against which present-day "Reform and Opening", as part of the "great renaissance of the Chinese nation"¹, is strongly suffused by a quest to regain past splendour. Germans, by contrast and against the background of the Hitlerite abyss in their own recent past, strenuously reassure occasional sceptics that re-unification, in 1990, of the country's western and eastern parts and integration of the reunited nation in the European Union is not meant to be a return to former great-power stature².

Views of China, by Chinese themselves as well as by others, are likely to be complex and similarly fraught with perceived or real risk of misreading. The presentation of "Perceptions and Images of China" in the first volume under review is therefore to be welcomed as a contribution to better mutual understanding between this fast-changing quarter of humanity and the outside world. Contributions – papers presented at a 2006 conference in Hong Kong on "The Perception of China: Images of a Global Player" – are grouped into four sections, on "Economics", "Political Science", "Law Studies" and "Cultural Studies". The essays on the economy and law in particular concentrate on contemporary China while those on politics and culture draw more on historical themes. Given that continuity, change and confronting the challenges of the present are at the core of ideas formed, inside and outside China, of the country's vertiginous transformation from peasant-society-cum-Maoist-tyranny towards hi-tech creditor of the United States of America, according weight to past and present more evenly in these four sections could have avoided skewing the overall analytical perspective. Instead the book assembles texts reading like a presentation canvassing potential investors, as *Li Shuoli's* "The Development of a Pan-Tonkin Gulf Economic Zone and China's Five National Development Strategies", alongside *Karl-Heinz Pohl's* lucid philological discussion of translating classical Chinese poetry. Much old ground is re-covered in some papers, as in *Liu Weijian's* sweeping "Toward a Postmodern Metropolis: Representation of Shanghai in German Literature and Media"; those seeking an introduction to the subject will be well served by *Gottfried-Karl Kindermann's* "New China in the Perceptions of U.S. Presidents from F.D. Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter"; the pressing concerns of foreign investors regarding effective protection of intellectual property in China are succinctly described in *Georg Sandberger's* "The Protection of Intellectual Property Rights After the People's Republic of China's Accession to the WTO".

I much regret to say that the manuscripts of several texts in this volume should never have made it past the reader's desk: Printing errors and faulty English mar this publication all the more considering the eminent position enjoyed by Nomos as one of Germany's

¹ *Zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing*, a standard element of official and media discourse.

² Cf eg the speech by Erhard Eppler in the (then Western) German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) on 17 June 1989: "Wenn wir von Wiedervereinigung sprechen, dann hören unsere Nachbarn vor allem das "Wieder"." (In: Auswärtiges Amt, Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Dokumente von 1949 bis 1994, Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995, p 596.)

foremost academic publishers³. It is to be hoped that considerably more editorial care will be invested in subsequent publications on a subject that richly deserves scholarly attention.

High-speed economic advances in the East Asia region have outpaced its foreign-policy foundations. The vast gains in prosperity already made and future gains on which the peoples of the region critically depend are left vulnerable to impediments of traditional emphases on national sovereignty and even notions of historic pre-eminence, to the disruptive potential of spatially limited but politically high-profile territorial disputes, and to the perils of power holders who feel boxed in by progress that has long swirled past their own sterile governance attempting to break out of their corner in dangerous fashion. ASEAN members casting their political net ever wider through dialogues with northern Asian neighbours, the slow dance of cautious partners in Central Asia in the comparatively recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the laborious institutionalised interaction of the Six-Party Talks on the Korean Peninsula and the first regular stand-alone meeting of the heads of government of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in Fukuoka earlier this year represent unhurried but encouraging attempts to regularise and intensify joint political efforts.

The "Security Handbook 2008" provides a helpful snapshot of a region whose political fault lines continue to endanger its huge potential. Professor *Giesmann's* introductory essay gives a concise and clear overview of this structural disparity; *Xia Liping* and *Ceng-yi Lin* outline future perspectives from mainland China and Taiwan respectively. *Alexandre Y Mansourov's* "Russia's Advances and Setbacks in Northeast Asia under President Putin (1999-2007)" describes growing commonalities in Russo-Chinese relations but also the significant caveats particularly about the imbalanced structure of bilateral trade, the competitive complications of Russia's multidirectional strategies in energy co-operation and Moscow's efforts at safeguarding Russia's strategic interests in the area of arms sales and military co-operation. Presidents Putin's "most significant triumph", of the conclusive agreement on the Russo-Chinese border, seems to have put to rest long-standing irredentist velleities on the Chinese side of the border where many continued to chafe at the Siberian

3 Eg, "newly gained *prepare* [?] property rights" (p 19), "*renown* boutiques" (p 20), "*evacuated*" [instead of 'evicted'] (p 23), "*wiped* [instead of 'swept'] under the rug" (p 26), "*politic* [instead of 'policy'] of reform" (p 126), "a society of '*small comfort*'" (p 127) quaintly translates the Chinese *xiao kang shehui*, rendered in English-language texts published in China as "moderately well-off society", "*stable* [?] legal order" (p 157), "*plague* of Western brands" (167), "*Mrd* \$" [instead of 'billion/bn' or '1,000 million'] (p 170), "can not [sic] be satisfied" (p 170), "interdicted" [instead of 'prohibited'] (p 177), "freewill" [sic] (196), "*Der rotblaue* [instead of 'blaurote'] Methusalem" (p 209), "*Putonhua*" [instead of 'Putonghua'] (p 215), "*outshined*" [instead of 'outshone'] (p 234), "*implementations* [?] about China" (p 253), "stood in the sign of" [for 'stand im Zeichen']?, "*scriptures* [sic] of the Jesuit missionaries" (p 254), "*Shengdu*" [instead of 'Chengdu']? (p 266), "the Great Revolution in 1911 ('the May Fourth Movement')" [the May 4th Movement began in 1919, not 1911], "Deng Hsiao-ping" [mixing two different transliteration systems of Chinese – either 'Deng Xiaoping' or 'Teng Hsiao-p'ing'] (p 268), "*literate* [?] like Hermann Hesse" (p 269), "to take ... pejorative [?]" (p 284), "a *not understandable*" [instead of 'unintelligible']? (p 285), "to *extinct* them" [instead of 'annihilate'/'exterminate'/'kill']? (p 285), "*week* [sic] male anti-heroes" (p 293), "only *the* dissent generates innovation" (p 295), etc.

losses after the 'unequal treaties' of Aigun (1858) and Peking (1860) with the Tsarist Empire. On the other hand, a settlement with Japan on the four northern islands remains but a vague prospect. Russia's rôle in the Six-Party Talks on the DPRK nuclear programme and the Korean Peninsula may be less publicly visible than China's as host country but stabilising supplies of military spares to the DPRK armed forces to ensure their "defensive potential" highlight Moscow's substantial interest in a minimum of stability in potentially highly fluid surroundings. *Nicholas Eberstadt's* "Economic Implications of a "Bold Switchover" in DPRK Security Policy Potentialities for Economic Performance in a Still-Socialist North Korea" outlines the considerable room for economic growth in the DPRK even without overturning the régime's political foundations.

The European Union is now China's largest trading partner and one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment in China. This considerable presence in the economic arena is not accompanied by security commitments of similar import and it seems apposite to recall that the eminent security commitments in Asia of the US – regarding Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – all predate the dramatic post-Mao upturn in economic exchanges with China, subtending but not reflecting the background of present-day relations with the China of "Reform and Opening". *Bernt Berger* and *Heather Gilmartin's* lengthy "The Quiet Europeans? Appraising Europe's Commitment to East Asian Security" perhaps involuntarily reflects the limits imposed on EU ambitions by both distance and the absence of 'hard' security responsibilities: Much debate on the EU's rôle in the security policy of the region has produced copious Euro-'discourse' and the recognition that the EU's contribution to enhanced security of East would chiefly consist in its instructive experience of successful integration and pooling of sovereignties. Even if this affords the EU no easy seat at East Asia's security top table, the EU's example may yet receive even closer attention from all those in the region who realise that East Asia's many important states stand to lose much more than slivers of national pride if they do not safeguard their impressive progress through co-operation which decisively transcends zero-sum rivalries.

Editing of this volume has been clearly better than that of "Perceptions and Images" but an eagle-eyed wielder of the blue pencil could still have saved several essays from numerous blemishing slip-ups⁴.

*Wolfgang Kessler, Peking**

⁴ Eg. "economic frames" (p 12), "dimensions of the geographic and geopolitical parameters" [instead of 'dimensions of geography and geopolitics'] (p 14), "Japan still treated as a *pariah* in large parts of Asia" (p 17) would seem a drastic overstatement, "the internal debates ... *has* not yet led" (p 23), "*crackdowns* [?] on the nuclear non-proliferation regime" (p 26), "Green Party KMT (Guomindang)" ... "Blue Party DPP" [gets the match wrong: the KMT are 'blue' and the DPP are 'green'; see the correct combination at p 198] (p 45), "It's" [instead of 'its'] (p 49f), "Foreign Minister Li Xiaoxing" [instead of 'Li Zhaoxing'] (p 220. n 20), "to *impeace* [?] its neighborhood" (p 225), "principle" [instead of 'principal'] (p 235), "complimentary" [instead of 'complementary'] (p 239).

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