

The end of western prominence and the arrival of the asian century

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



The world is witnessing a new era of global history: the end of Western prominence and the arrival of the Asian century. It is difficult not to sound clichéd when talking about the rise of Asia in the 21st Century. Asian countries are gaining economic, cultural, and political mileage in this era. Already, the economic performance of India, South Korea, Japan, China and other South and East Asian countries accounts for approximately forty percent of the global output. Moreover, the continent has demonstrated global leadership in technology, military strength, and international diplomacy. On the other hand, the United States may not be doing so well in maintaining its 20th-century supremacy. America is facing problems including debt, infrastructure decay, poor healthcare system, violence, and inequality, which threaten the international reputation of the country (Edwards, 2015: 332). Scholars who agree with the rising of Asia attribute their arguments to the geopolitical dominance of the continent (Yap, 2012: 486, 487). Those that argue against these projections cite the region's demographic hurdles such as the high rate of poverty, the aging population, and the worsening environmental pollution in the East (Edwards, 2015: 333). Despite these perceived challenges, Asia has continued to show immense advancement instability and economic growth (Hsiung, 2010: 467). While the problems of the Asian continent may slow down its rise, present indications are strong enough to guarantee the 21st century as the Asian century.

The rise of Asian economies began in the 1960s. It was characterized by a surge of growth in Japan followed by the " Four Tigers," Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Korea (Kohli, Sharma & Sood, 2013: 123). Thailand and Malaysia joined in the path in the 1980s and later China in the late 1980s.

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Currently, China is the second largest economic power after the United States. These massive economic growths are what made the 19th century the British century, and the 20th century the American century; however, Asia faced various challenges on the road to economic success. For instance, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 caused damages in stocks, asset prices, and slumped currencies of most of Asia (Kohli, Sharma, & Sood, 2013: 263). Despite this setback, economies of Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia recovered, scoring a 10 percent growth rate in their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Additionally, the taper tantrum of 2013 dented the stability of financial markets in most emerging economies of Asia (Kohli, Sharma, & Sood, 2013: 187). Even so, the continent demonstrated resilience and strength through its foreign exchange markets and Asian stocks.

The mechanism of the growth of Asia is embedded with the global economy. Specifically, China is seeking to expand its investment opportunities in new technologies, infrastructure connectivity, new business patterns and new products. Beijing has increased its naval capabilities through expansion into the Indian Ocean, strategically arming itself for trade. The country has developed naval-base-use-related ports and naval-base ports in Kyaukphyu in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Gwadar in Pakistan (Sidda-Goud & Mookherjee, 2015: 12, 13). The naval bases will act as a seal line of communication and an energy-supply route from the Indian Ocean to Southern China. Other schools of thought suspect the “String of Pearls” as a Chinese ambition to increase its military facilities. Nevertheless, these networks have expanded the geopolitical influence of Asia through fostering

trading partners and diplomatic relations. Additionally, the lines of communication are meant to secure the country's future energy needs as China depends on foreign sources of energy to drive its economy.

In addition to naval ports, Beijing is using an infrastructure based development strategy to increase its global markets. As a world leader in infrastructure investment, the country has established connectivity with Eastern European countries. One such project is the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR). The belt describes the physical road from China, through Europe to Scandinavia while the Road is the shipping routes built on the maritime Silk Road. These trading paths could facilitate Chinese exports to emerging markets all over Europe. Arguably, this investment is going to favor the growth of other ASEAN countries by creating accessible trading partners. Pakistan is a crucial country in the One Road, One Belt Initiative. This is because of its strategic position as a potential corridor through the Karakoram Highway. China has initiated the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project which includes construction of railways, roads, agricultural farms, industrial parks, airports, energy-generating projects, fiber optic network, and solar farms. The \$60 billion infrastructure will be built by Chinese and will include modern, safe cities that are guaranteed to change the outlook of the war-torn country. With no doubt, the magnitude of this operation will improve the living standards of people and boost the economy of Pakistan. Despite the projected problems in conflict, terrorism, and corruption, CPEC is an ambitious development project that could contribute to the growing prosperity of Asia.

Transport infrastructure in the East is in contrast with the slow investment in transportation infrastructure in the United States and Europe after 1980. America has notably lagged behind in the upgrading of its networks among industrialized countries such as Japan, China, France, and the United Kingdom. Moreover, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Beijing have invested heavily in resilient transportation which utilizes multiple energy sources. There is a general trend towards the adaptation of electric cars, buses and bicycles and a high-speed rail in the integrated transport system. The importance of transportation to the economic growth of a country cannot be overemphasized. Efficient physical connectivity enhances domestic and international transportation of workforce, goods, and services. China's investment has contributed to the region's connectivity. On the other hand, some scholars argue that these investments may not realize their potential in the 21st century. Foot and Walter (2011: 76, 77, 79) suggest that the positive economic growth can only be a reality after the investment scale exceeds a threshold level. To support this argument, the effort by the Chinese government to improve the local economies of marginalized provinces is successful because of the transport and telecommunication development.

Similar to China, India is positioning itself to dominate the Indian Ocean Region through investment, trade, strategic partnerships, and strategy (Sidda-Goud & Mookherjee, 2015: 16, 17). The Indian Ocean is a significant route of the global commerce. Historically, the naval supremacy of the ocean lay with India. Nevertheless, the British colonialists weakened this

dominance by encouraging inward trade. It is not until the 1990s when India shifted the direction of business from trans-Atlantic economies and regained her interests in the ocean. The Pakistan stand-off disrupted the land links to Eastern Europe. To add to this, because of the rise of trade and the high demand for energy in South East Asia, the Indian Ocean became a critical route. Today, the ocean serves as trade routes that serve Southern and East African countries, New Zealand and Australia. The state has invested heavily in modernizing its ports to improve the maritime economy. As a result, sixty percent of the country's exports are linked to the Indian Ocean (Sidda-Goud & Mookherjee, 2015: 20). Despite these milestones, there are security concerns caused by China's increasing activities in the Indian Ocean. This has motivated India to strengthen its maritime security. India's policy on the ocean is centered on maintaining a zone of peace. Its proximity to the Indian Ocean, South Asian countries are in a strategic position for trade.

The Asian nuclear space is expanding and diversifying at a considerably high rate. Notably, China, Pakistan, and India are the leading strategist in the region on atomic weapons (Kohli, Sharma & Sood, 2013: 102, 103). As expected, China has the most sophisticated weaponry. Foot and Walter (2011: 87) attest such developments to the foreseen strategic competition between the Chinese and the Americans. Modernization of China's nuclear tools is meant to counter dangerous threats from the United States and India. Russia is also considered a strategic uncertainty for Beijing. Some of these include ballistic missiles capable of reaching the Americas and nuclear storage sites. On the other hand, India has enormous weaponry which is

assisted by the United States. The country's prolonged conflict with Pakistan and threat from China has motivated its investments in nuclear might.

Though Pakistan has limited atomic weapons, it poses a threat to New Delhi in support of the terrorist attacks (Kohli, Sharma, & Sood, 2013: 343). The United States has the most advanced nuclear weaponry in the world, hence maintaining atomic dominance.

Another gain for Asian countries is its infiltration in Africa. In 2009, Asia became Africa's largest trading partner, a position that was previously held by the United States (Benabdallah, 2016: 549). Additionally, China built its first military base in Djibouti in 2017, further showing its ability to solidify the China-in-Africa dominance (Blanchard & Perry, 2017). Meanwhile, Africa seems to fall back on the U. S. foreign policy agenda. The Trump administration continues to show very little interest in the continent, further pushing African states to the East (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2018). In the past decade, China and Japan have invested billions of dollars in the African market in the form of infrastructure, trade and cultural exchange programs. Chinese companies have financed Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway, Ethiopia's African Union, Nigeria's coastal railway, the Tanzanian-Zambian railway and other ambitious projects (Benabdallah, 2016: 547). Japan, on the other hand, is mobilizing \$30 billion for Africa's healthcare systems, agriculture, security, and infrastructure. Additionally, Malaysia has the most extensive foreign direct investment portfolio in Africa. Various scholars have debated the economic dominance of Asia in African. Foot and Walter (2011: 118) argue that the United States leads in the annual

foreign direct investment in Africa. However, statistics show different trends. In 2015, China alone invested 4.5 percent versus America's 6.3 percent in Sub-Saharan countries (Benabdalla, 2016: 548). As expected, the West continually criticizes the interests of Asia-Africa relations. Some of the concerns floated including a crippling future debt, low priced low-quality Chinese goods, Chinese import of labor and materials, illegal extraction practices, outsourcing of pollution to African countries, and corruption. Though these problems are legitimate, there is a general perception that America's opinion is based on supremacy rather than genuine interests in the African population.

Despite Asia global gains in trade, economy and diplomacy relations, many scholars believe that the continent has a long way to catch up with the United States. First, most of Asia's population is still much weaker than their American counterparts. The spending power of the average American is higher than that of the East. (Kohli, Sharma, & Sood (2013: 281) explain that Asia faces considerable challenges that may hinder its rise to the top. The environmental, political and demographic problems make the region less coherent than the West. Although there are increased interregional ties with other nations, it may take Asia a long time to build close relations that can surpass organizations such as the European Union (Foot & Walter, 2011: 120). The political tension in East Asian countries is evident and is set to deter growth. Japan, India, and China have divergent political views which may take a long time to resolve. The region also lacks a cohesive force that

can act as a bargaining chip in financial matters in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The aging population in China is likely to cause turbulence in the growth trajectory. Because of China's one-child policy, the nation is expected to experience an unproductive community (Hsiung, 2010: 468). Furthermore, countries like Japan have recorded a negative population growth rate due to disinterest in the family system among the youth. Aging Asia is also fueled by an increased life expectancy which is owed to the improved living standards over the decades. Another political hurdle is the enormous public debt accrued to finance ambitious development projects in Asia. In Hong Kong, the public debt exceeds two-hundred percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (Kohli, Sharma, & Sood, 2013: 151). More impoverished territories such as Bangladesh and Pakistan are projected to make the poor people more miserable. Despite the insignificant impact of external debt on the average citizen, the high domestic debt is likely to slow down economic growth.

Such trajectories have led to the most substantial inequality in the history of Asia. The East has some of the wealthiest people in the world. Ironically, the continent hosts some of the poorest cities globally. In China, farmers in rural areas survive on \$300 annually (Kohli, Sharma & Sood (201: 33, 34).

Similarly, the income per capita is an estimated \$7000. These observations are caused by the poor domestic policies on development that favor urban areas at the expense of rural villages. As a result of the inequality, there have been multiple protests by citizens to curb the problem (Fravel, 2018:

506). The unrests are becoming increasingly violent and frequent, showing the desperate situation of the marginalized. Other territories that face similar issues are India, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In India, landowners and upper-class members are frequently attacked by a Muslim terrorist in a bid to share in the wealth. Cambodia has faced increased violent mass unrest by students in protest of the high inequality (Fravel, 2018: 509, 510). This situation is not likely to change owing to the governments' hardline stand on domestic economic policies. Consequently, the environmental degradation is also threatening the rise of Asia. Though the continent is developing economically, the quality of life is affected by air, water and soil pollution. South East Asian cities rank poorly in air pollution. As a result, the population is facing the highest respiratory health infections in the world. Notably, children are particularly vulnerable, creating a weak and sick society.

Under these circumstances, the United States may retain its position in power for a while. The American economy is three times than that of China (Foot & Walter, 2011: 115). Additionally, it ranks second to Switzerland in maintaining open and business-friendly relations. However, keeping this position is contentious due to the current intolerant foreign policies and the aggressive nature of the East on establishing diplomatic ties. An additional strength of America is its military dominance (Edwards, 2015: 334). The United States has the most massive investment in military force and intelligence. However, various questions have been raised about the cybersecurity attack capacity of the country in the wake of the hacked Trump campaign.

America is still the leading global innovation hub in the world. It has dominated areas in technology, renewable energy and biotechnology (Edwards, 2015: 332). Asia, on the other hand, has immigration practices that make it difficult for external innovators to penetrate the market (Foot & Walter, 2011: 126). Moreover, the venture capitals in the East is very minimal, a trend that discourages entrepreneurs to flourish in the Asian markets. As a result, many Chinese and Indian nationals move to the United States to explore and implement their innovations. A good example is the Silicon Valley in California where immigrants from Asia almost one-quarter of all the businesses. Asia's hindrances to immigration also undermine the growth of world-class educational institutions. Leading universities depend on free exchange and migration of nationals from all over the world. Notwithstanding, China's dominance is in research, but not on the academic diversity of ideas.

Generally, the world has more trust in the United States than it has in Asia (Foot & Walter, 2011: 125). The West has accused China of its unwillingness to address global concerns such as terrorism. India and Japan also tend to focus more on national issues than international problems. America, on the other hand, has an active and arguably invasive foreign policy. The country is known to assert its political interests in local matters of other nations. Amid controversial, this trend has seen the United States claim leadership in safety, human rights, liberal trading and international security issues.

In summary, there are strong economic and political indications to guarantee the 21st century as the Asian century. Asia is readying itself for global and

geopolitical dominance. China, India, and Japan are the leading powers whose activities are strengthening their position in the international security and global economy. These may be at the expense of the dominance of the United States which is projected to lose its power to the East in the 21st Century. The indications of these trends are many, and cannot be ignored. First, Asia has new economic powerhouses that are aggressively pursuing global dominance. Establishment of trade routes such as India's Indian Ocean and China's One Road, One Belt initiatives are projected give the continent advantage in trade. Additionally, investments in military and technology power, further close the gap to world dominance. Still, economic experts argue that Asia will take a long time to reach America's supremacy. The high rate of poverty, environmental pollution, and demographic challenges may slow down, but not hinder the rise of the Asian continent.