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# Introduction

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*"Asian peoples no longer need think in terms of an East Asian framework. In view of the prevailing economic, defense, and political relations in the region, it would seem reasonable to take the entire Pacific Basin as the sphere of [an] emerging civilization."*

—Masakazu Yamazaki, Japanese scholar and playwright

## PERSPECTIVES ON A PACIFIC CENTURY

"Pacific Century" has become a catchphrase for an Asian economic renaissance. Used most frequently with reference to the future, the term more accurately reflects the past — a century of modernizing encounters with the West that have profoundly shaped the region. As the new century begins to converge with a New Asia, the term will retain its implication for the future, for many believe that the Pacific is giving rise to a new era in human history.

This book looks but tangentially at that future, being devoted primarily to understanding the present Pacific Century. If the world has experienced several, perhaps many of these "Pacific" eras, surely none has been as globally significant as the present one. The next century may bear the sobriquet of the great ocean, but it will be a product of the century that is now passing. By reviewing this past we are better able to understand why Pacific Asia, after more than a century of conflict and subjugation by the West, has revived with such force and dynamism.

## *The Pacific Transition*

The majority of the Asia Pacific economies have passed a set of milestones which, taken together, constitute an unprecedented transformation of this broad region in a very short time. In their per capita incomes, trade and investment volumes, education levels, and numerous other indicators, many of these societies have exceeded the goals set by their most extravagant dreamers of a century ago.

The modernization period for Pacific Asia stretches back into the nineteenth century. It embraces the rise and demise of the colonial era, birth pangs of new Asian nations, calamitous wars and rebellions, the growth of great metropolises, export and investment booms and busts, and countless other landmarks of change. Yet this period in Asian history remains poorly understood in the West. Coinciding with one of the greatest worldwide economic expansions in history, it was shaped as much as in any other region by Western cultural and technological influences. Asian traditions may have exerted counter influences in artistic movements and trade relationships, but the impact from the West was proportionately greater.

This historic imbalance may be coming to an end. A transition is now underway that will place Pacific Asia on a more equal footing with the West in the coming century.

Already, this transition has altered the structure of world business and industry. Expanding as they mature, Asian industries are achieving a global reach that has displaced some industries in the West. Like all broad impacts, this one inspires exaggerated claims by pundits and alarmists, some of whom predict the "Asianization of the world" and that China will engulf the Pacific region. But just as Mandarin is not about to become the *lingua franca* of Pacific Asia — English retains that standing outside Chinese regions — it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the center of the world is returning to Asia. Rather, Asia's relationship to the world is changing and intensifying. In the process, Asia will indeed help shape the global community.

Examples abound, but to cite only a few. Korea now conducts more trade with the developing world than with all the developed nations combined. Japan has turned anew toward Asia, conducting a greater volume of trade with its Asian neighbors than with Europe and America together. Japan passed yet another milestone in 1995 by manufacturing more overseas than it exported, demonstrating how extensively its global economic activity has been dispersed. These changes imply a fundamental shift in the geographic weight of global economic activity. According to World Bank growth forecasts, the shift will have occurred decidedly toward Asia within a quarter century. This is part of a larger transition by which the so-called "developing nations" will surpass the industrial nations in aggregate percentage of world output, a change that is being driven mostly from Pacific Asia.

Barring unforeseen disasters, such as a major war or global depression, this strong economic growth will continue even if the historically fast pace gradually slows. For many, such a slowdown will be welcome and overdue. The boom of the 1980s and 1990s vaulted several Asian capitals into the ranks of the most expensive cities in the world. While living costs have soared, travelers have learned that they must book flights to these cities weeks in advance. Ports and surrounding urban regions are straining to accommodate the

*Modern Western civilization has brought the world umbrella to Asia for the first time, and a dual structure of civilization is now taking shape in the region. The Asian world and Asian civilization cited so often of late have their origins not deep in the past but in modernization this century in an Asia in contact with the West.*

—Masakazu Yamazaki

expansion. Not surprisingly, the environmental burdens are becoming acute as well, even if for now the remedies are being postponed in the interest of rapid, short term growth.

Modernization implies a host of real costs to societies, but in Asia the pejorative connotation of the term has lost much of its impact amid a reduction of poverty on a vast scale. We are better able to see modernization for what it is, a dynamic mix of global forces — economic, social, cultural, and technological — each having a broadly unifying effect in the Pacific Rim. The observations of playwright Masakazu Yamazaki, quoted above, summarize what is still only vaguely recognized; that modernization is shaping a "Pacific" civilization built on several levels and dividing East and West less than is commonly believed.

The first task, then, must be to define what is meant by "modern" in the Asian context. The concept of the "modern" is one that Asians have defined in a variety of ways, ranging from an economic and cultural state toward which they strive to the embodiment of influences they wish to reject. However broad the meaning, its omission from the historian's vocabulary seems unnecessary and its use in the title of a major historical work, *The Search for Modern China*, is encouraging. The author of that work, Jonathan Spence, provides us with as good a definition as any of how the term "modern" may be used in assessing China's development and, by extension, that of other nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

*I understand a "modern" nation to be one that is both integrated and receptive, fairly sure of its own identity yet able to join others on equal terms in the quest for new markets, new technologies, new ideas. If it is used in this open*

*sense, we should have no difficulty in seeing "modern" as a concept that shifts with the times as human life unfolds, instead of simply relegating the sense of "modern" to our own contemporary world while consigning the past to the "traditional" and the future to the "postmodern."*<sup>1</sup>

## PACIFIC ASIA: CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS, RATIONALE

### *What Is Asia?*

Asia is a concept invented by the Greeks in the fifth century BCE\*. It has survived ever since as a useful construct for outsiders. For Homer, the word "Asia" meant only the region of Anatolia (modern Turkey). For the Greeks, who divided the known world into three great parts, Homer's Asia was but "Asia Minor." The real Asia to them was called "Asia Major." Evocative of a vast, rich, and powerful land that encompassed the Persian Empire, then the world's greatest empire, Asia seemed to the Greeks to stretch unendingly toward the east from Anatolia. Real and imaginary images of what we now call Asia were to haunt the dreams of Alexander the Great in his quest to unite the known world just the way they would beckon countless explorers, conquerors, traders, and wanderers in subsequent centuries.

The concept of "Asia," created by outsiders, clearly did not originate with Asians themselves, but they eventually appropriated it for their own uses and accepted a number of subdivisions established by geographers and historians. "South Asia" and "Southwest Asia" have been blocked out within the Eurasian landmass, but their boundaries remain fluid. A division of the region according to its physical features, for example, may have little bearing on political and cultural areas. Thus, Southwest Asia (or West Asia) embraces such areas as the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran but omits other parts

of the region whose transcendent feature is the Arabic language and culture. The term "Middle East" gets us no further. It, too, is vague and strikes the inhabitants as Eurocentric, but they call it *Sharq al-Awsat*, which literally means "Middle East" in Arabic. Other parts of Asia confront these same dilemmas.

In short, how one defines the component parts of "Asia" are matters of time and vantage point. The terms used here may be disputed, but if it is understood that they represent concepts that have always been malleable, tolerance will prevail.

### *Pacific Asia*

Diversity — geographic, cultural and political — is the overriding reality of the area we will call **Pacific Asia**, but the accompanying reality is one of interaction and mutual influence that makes a regional construct increasingly relevant and useful. Today more than ever, one is challenged to discern both the general and the particular when discussing trends in Pacific Asia.

This region excludes much that is traditionally embraced within the term "Asia." Omitted, for example, are "South Asia" (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) and the countries of "Southwest Asia" noted above. Although Pacific Asia historically has had significant levels of interaction with these regions, its most recent cultural and economic orientations have been toward the Pacific littoral. Pacific Asia comprises *East Asia* and *Southeast Asia*, two major sociogeographical subsets (along with Oceania, North America, and South America) in the overarching concept of a **Pacific Basin**.<sup>2</sup>

A natural division can be made within this latter realm between the Western Pacific, on the one hand, and North America on the other. In spite of their being geologically connected in the north, the two halves of the region have developed throughout their histories in fundamentally different ways. Only in the past century did they begin to converge significantly, each driven by the

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\* BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) will be used in this text, replacing BC and AD respectively.

necessities of modern commerce. Previously, for Western Pacific societies, the Indian Ocean and the Silk Road of Inner Asia were the avenues of distant commerce. America was not part of the "known world" until the late fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The physical barriers that have inhibited the flow of people throughout the Asia-Pacific region naturally form the boundaries around which Asian societies and cultures have coalesced. They continue to shape our understanding of how the world of the Pacific Basin is divided.

## EAST ASIA

### *China and Inner Asia*

The largest political unit of Asia has been and remains China. Its combined population and physical domain have not been equaled by any other Asian nation. Within its vast geography, stretching into "Inner Asia," are five components that make the total picture somewhat easier to comprehend:

China "proper," consists of three great river basins — the Huanghe (Yellow River) in the north, the Yangzi in central China, and the Xijiang (West River) in the South.

The first of these rivers, the Huanghe, served as "the cradle of Chinese civilization" by sustaining the earliest settlements that would become Chinese society around 3000 BCE. From there, in the area of the Wei Ho valley or "Great Bend" of the river, these settlements spread both north and south toward the natural barriers that were to establish their relative isolation from more distant lands. The Huanghe has been both bane and blessing to China for many centuries, having flooded so often with destructive results that it became known as "China's Sorrow." The flooding even led to a major change in the course of the river during the nineteenth century: Where previously it flowed southward below Shandong province it now flows north to the Gulf of Zhi Li. The possibility of its flowing southward once again cannot be ruled out.

The relatively cool climate of North China sustains bountiful harvests of millet and wheat in its river valleys. The Yangzi River Basin in central China is an area of even greater agricultural rich-

ness that supports rice and cotton-growing. The great commercial cities of China — Shanghai, Nanjing (Nanking), Wuhan (Hankou), and Chongqing (Chungking) are on the Yangzi River. By far the largest proportion of China's population resides in this region which comprises about three-quarters of a million square miles.

The smallest of the three major river basins, the Xijiang, is separated from northern and central China by a mountain range known as the Nan Shan. This semitropical southern area has been physically distinct from the rest of China, a separation that has contributed to its population's reputation for being very independent-minded. Minority groups are the norm here because the Han Chinese only arrived in large numbers in the twelfth century. The key city of Guangzhou (Canton) and the colonies of Macao and Hong Kong served as important early points of contact with the West. This region of China remains the source of many Western impressions of the whole country.

*Manchuria*, an area in northeast China with a broad plain bordered by two mountain ranges, has attracted a massive and relatively recent inflow of Chinese from the south. Prior to the twentieth century, Manchuria was the private domain of the Manchu conquerors of China and therefore was closed to immigration by ordinary Chinese. Its immense natural resource endowments, combining soybean and wheat croplands with great forests and mineral deposits, have made it an obvious strategic-economic asset and the object of bloody contests among imperial powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

*Mongolia* is now only partially claimed by China. The present-day People's Mongolian Republic consists of what was once called "Outer Mongolia." It is bordered along the north by Russian Siberia (see below) and in this century has been allied to Russia. Next to it, "Inner Mongolia," with a slightly larger population, grew out of the traditional acceptance by the Mongols of Chinese suzerainty during the period when the Manchus controlled the imperial throne in Beijing. China has perpetuated its control in the area by creating frontier provinces whose purpose, in part, is to prevent movements toward independence and unification among the Mongol people. Another form of control has been the resettlement

of Han Chinese into China's province, with the result that today more Han Chinese than Mongolians reside there. The region is bordered by the Gobi Desert in the south and is generally pastoral, supporting great herds of sheep, goats, cows, camels, and horses.

*Xinjiang* is one of the least-known areas of China and it defies ordinary Western notions of what China is like. Sometimes known as Chinese Turkestan, the Xinjiang region is populated by traditionally nomadic, Turkic-speaking Uigurs, most of whom are Moslems. The extreme remoteness of the area, combined with its harsh desert climate, has prevented serious exploitation of what may be extensive mineral resources.

*Tibet* lies to the south of Xinjiang amid a vast watershed of mountain ranges. The great river systems of both India and China flow from the deep valleys of this region, making it in popular reference the "Roof of the World." Over the centuries, China has claimed the right to control Tibet, but not until the relatively recent Manchu (or Qing) Dynasty was a close association established and then only by force. For a period in the early twentieth century Tibet became independent of China until the latter reasserted control in 1950. The inhabitants of Tibet are of Mongolian origin. Their political and religious life is centered around a Lamaist and Buddhist faith for which the focus is a spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and his great monastery palace at Lhasa, the Potala.

The island of *Taiwan*, with a land area of approximately 36,000 km<sup>2</sup>, lies off the southern shores of China. Its mountainous terrain leaves only a quarter of the land available for intensive agriculture. The climate is subtropical. China asserted its official control over Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty. Since 1949, however, Taiwan's leaders have defied control from the mainland, treating the island as a separate economic and political entity.

### *Korea, Japan, and East Siberia*

The *Korean Peninsula* is approximately the size of the state of Idaho. Beyond a range of high mountains in the north it is connected to the Asian landmass by the Manchurian plain. Surrounded by the Yellow Sea to the west and the Sea of Japan

to the east, it forms a natural "landbridge" to and from the Japan Islands which lie to the south. This accident of geography has made Korea a crossroad of foreign invasion from both China and Japan. Even so, passage across Korea has never been easy: Its terrain is mountainous and only 20 percent of the peninsula is available for agricultural production.

In spite of Korea's proximity to China and Japan, its people do not trace their ethnic origins to either country. The ancestors of present-day Koreans came in successive migratory waves from Siberia, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria to form, over time, a very homogenous ethnic group. The language is Altaic, that is, related to Manchurian and Mongolian tongues, and except for borrowed terms it has no relationship to Chinese or Japanese.

*Japan* lies off the Asian continent next to China and Korea and comprises four primary islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Its climate, dominated by the monsoons, is complicated by the surrounding ocean and its proximity to the Asian landmass. Winters along the coast of the Japan Sea are snowy and moderate, for example, while along the Pacific seaboard they are cold and dry. The Japanese islands are poorly endowed with natural resources but the oceans that surround them make Japan one of the major fishing nations of the world.

The islands are subject to earthquakes and occasional volcanic activity, so the population concentrates in lowland areas. The land must support the seventh highest population on earth, but only 15 percent of the area is cultivable. Thus, the appropriate uses of land, in what has become a highly industrialized society, generate ongoing controversy.

With the exception of the Ainu, a small minority ethnic group, and several hundred thousand immigrant Koreans, the Japanese population has remained remarkably homogeneous over the centuries. In ethnolinguistic terms Japan is 99 percent Japanese.

The name "*Siberia*" evokes images of vast stretches of tundra and isolated villages. In fact, there is no unitary territory officially designated by that name. Rather, Siberia refers to a region encompassing all lands within modern Russia east of the Ural Mountains. The most significant

portions of this region for our purposes are "Eastern Siberia" and the "Russian Far East." The former comprises the region east of Lake Baikal and north of China and Mongolia, including its major cities Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk. The Russian Far East consists primarily of the regions bordering the Pacific Ocean. Its major cities are Khabarovsk, Yakutsk, and Vladivostok. These two regions combined cover an area more than 10,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>, yet the population, made up mostly of immigrants from the "European" areas of Russia, numbers little more than fourteen million.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

### *Mainland Southeast Asia*

A major transition occurs when we move below south China into an area that is gradually losing its colonial-era label, "Indochina." For many centuries, the eastern portion of mainland Southeast Asia, principally Vietnam, fell under the nominal suzerainty of China, and the cultural attributes from that influence are still evident. Within the mainland region lie the modern states of Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia (Kampuchea), and Vietnam.

This mainland region is divided geographically into three parts according to the north-south mountain systems that emerge from the highlands of South China. To the west of a mountain chain running down through the Malay Peninsula lies Burma. The central, lower area is Thailand and Cambodia. Laos and Vietnam are demarcated by the Annam Mountains which parallel the coast of the South China Sea. The western sections of mainland Southeast Asia are also mountainous, particularly Laos. Similarly, Burma is hemmed in by mountains on three sides which feed its triple river system: the Irrawaddy, Chindwin, and Sittang.

Cambodia and the southern area of Vietnam enjoy a thriving agriculture, mainly rice cultivation, on the great plain of the Mekong River Delta. In Burma, the Irrawaddy Delta also produces abundant rice. Thailand's main area of agricultural production, a central plain drained by the Chao Phraya River, contains both its present

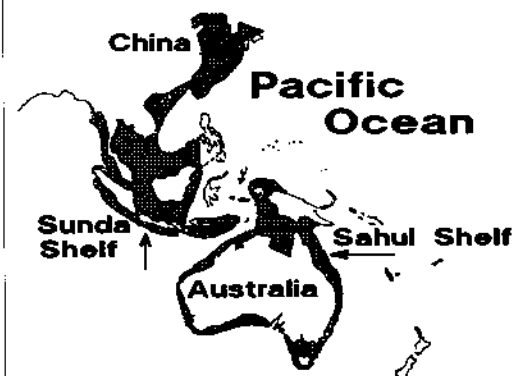
capital, Bangkok, and its former capital, Ayuthya. In Vietnam, the physical geography mirrors its polarized political geography: the south's Mekong River Delta matches the Songkoi (Red River) delta in the north but is twice its size. The two are linked by a long backbone of mountains and, parallel to it, a coastal lowland region. Northern Vietnam is much more rugged than the south.

Southeast Asia's numerous ethnic groups are distributed in complex patterns. They have emerged from two sources: first, southward migrations over many centuries under pressure from the southern expansion of the Han Chinese, and second, the importation of laborers from India and China during the period of European colonization. There are broadly shared linguistic traditions in mainland Southeast Asia that include the Tai speaking peoples. The most widely-shared religious belief of the mainland area is Buddhism, although there are numerous exceptions.

### *Island Southeast Asia.*

Geologically, the mainland of Asia juts further to the southeast than is apparent on most maps. Nearly all the great islands of Southeast Asia stand on the continental shelf of Asia known as the Sunda Shelf, covered by relatively shallow sea in the Malacca Strait, the Java Sea, and the southern part of the South China Sea. The Sunda Shelf abuts the Sahul Shelf to the south and their proximity in previous epochs has caused an upthrusting of mountain ranges alongside deep oceans, particularly near Indonesia. Much of the region is still volcanic, forming part of the geological "ring of fire" that emerges at key points elsewhere around the Pacific Rim.

In this realm lie the large nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the much smaller states of Singapore and Brunei. Climatically, most of the region is maritime equatorial, meaning that both temperatures and rainfall are consistently high. In this "watery world" of ocean and rain, a generally dense vegetation ranges from lowland swamps near the oceans to great equatorial forests covering the higher altitudes. The ratio of soils fitted for intensive agriculture



is relatively limited in comparison with the overall land area. Mineral resources, particularly oil in Indonesia and tin in Malaysia, have been mainstays of those economies. The Philippines is a strongly agricultural region with most production (especially rice) occurring on the island of Luzon. Population densities in Island Southeast Asia vary: Certain islands in both Indonesia and the Philippines (i.e., Java and Luzon) are so heavily populated that they are reaching crisis densities while in Malaysia officials are pondering ways to increase the population growth of northern Borneo.

The underlying ethnicity of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines is "Malay" with an admixture of Chinese and indigenous tribal groups. A highly fragmented geography in the region, particularly in Indonesia, which embraces thousands of islands, has contributed to this complexity. Indonesia's population speaks at least 250 languages, not counting the many local tongues in its far eastern portion of Irian Jaya. Religious beliefs are an especially important factor in social identities. Much of maritime Southeast Asia outside the Philippines professes loyalty to Islam, even though the older animistic religions continue in some areas and provide a significant underpinning to the Islamic faith. By contrast, the majority of Filipinos are Catholics. The major exception is the Muslim enclave in the southern and southwestern peripheries of the archipelago facing Malaysia, particularly on the island of Mindanao.

The most geographically diverse area in the Pacific Basin is Oceania, inclusive of Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. The anthropologist Douglas L. Oliver summarized the diversity at the beginning of his classic survey:

*Ten thousand islands lie scattered over the face of Oceania, ranging from tiny atoll islets barely visible above pounding surf to continental Australia, three million square miles large. Every conceivable kind of physical setting is to be found. Almost within sight of the snow fields which cap New Guinea's central mountains are sweltering equatorial swamps. And the traveler need not voyage from Australia's desert to rain-soaked Hawaii to compare climatic extremes: he can find nearly as great contrast on single islands.<sup>4</sup>*

The varied and expansive area of Oceania is embraced within a single concept that derives from origins in remote geological time and from the animal, plant, and human populations that adapted in it much later. Situated on the Sunda Shelf, maritime Southeast Asia extends down almost to Australia. There it encounters "Oceania's western moat" — a deep ocean rift that has been an ancient barrier to the passage of animal and plant life. Beyond lies the Sahul Shelf containing Australia and the great continental high island of Papua New Guinea. Islands far off to the south and east are either remnants of ancient continents (such as New Zealand) or volcanoes whose crests remained above the ocean (such as Hawaii and Tahiti) or have been eroded down to sea-level coral outcrops around an ancient crater rim (such as Truk in the Caroline Islands and Kwajalein in the Marshalls). Australia and Oceania were among the last major world regions to be inhabited by humans.

## NORTH AMERICA

The eastern seaboard of North America has interacted significantly with the Pacific Basin from the nineteenth century on, but now the most

intensive interaction is in the American West (including western Canada, Mexico, and the United States). What follows is a sketch of the important and sometimes overlooked geographic features that have contributed to America's West Coast settlement patterns and intensifying interchange with Asia.

The Pacific coast of North America "faces" the rest of the Basin and is connected to it geologically. Two main "fold lines" cross over from Asia; one moving through the Aleutian Islands and the other coming from the Bering Strait in the heights of Northeast Asia. The first, the Aleutian fold, begins at the Alaska Mountains where it follows the curve of the Gulf of Alaska, then descends along the coast to Vancouver in the course of which it is broken by the sea into a fringe of islands. Another line of the Aleutian fold becomes the Coast Range, the Cascade Range, and the Sierras to form the western rim of a great plateau area. The second great fold descends much further to the east until it forms the eastern rim of the great plateau which is about eight hundred miles wide near San Francisco. This tableland tilts toward the Pacific, so that its rivers, breaking through the mountains, flow down to the sea.

The lowlands of the American Pacific coast run from Vancouver to the Gulf of California in an almost continuous valley lying between the ocean and the mountains of the great plateau. The three major sections are the Fraser-Columbia-Willamette valleys in the north, the Sacramento-San Joaquin valleys in the center — both rich agricultural areas — and the Gulf of California, the head of the valley, now mostly drowned by the sea and surrounded by extremely dry lowlands.

The high elevations of the great plateau are traps for the moisture coming in from the Pacific. Falling mainly as snow in the mountains, it piles up and then melts during the summer when the dry lands of California most need the water. Similar inward movement of moist air along the seaward slopes north of 40 degrees latitude creates an almost constant rainfall that nourishes the vast forest reserves of North America.

These natural endowments have greatly influenced early American commerce with the Pacific Basin. The first great attraction for settlement was gold. Then, a more diverse economy, attractive climate, and later a thriving culture have drawn

millions to the American Pacific shore. Significant numbers of this still-growing immigrant population have roots that stretch, like the land itself, to Asia.

## CONTINENT AND OCEAN: THE TWO FRONTIERS

Concepts of what is "Asia" have changed over time, with a fundamental shift of perspective — the "Pacific Basin" perspective — having begun as the West approached Asia from the New World. Yet an equally fundamental shift occurred in China. The nature of the change can be best visualized by holding up a globe and positioning its center at Beijing, then repositioning the globe to focus on an early maritime center such as Manila. The two worlds of Pacific Asia become readily apparent. The first is a world dominated by the continental land mass of Asia; the second by the ocean.

Over geological time, the Asian continent has been the predominant influence on the sea around it. Even though only a small part of the mainland drains into the Pacific,<sup>5</sup> one finds rocks, plants, animals, and inhabitants far out into the ocean that are Asiatic in character and origin. The Pacific also sends powerful currents and winds toward the continent that profoundly affect its life. These two dimensions provide a convenient analogy for the shift of perspective and new interaction that occurred between Asia's land- and ocean-centered worlds.

For many centuries, the rich treasures and innovations of China rippled outward along the maritime trade routes through Southeast Asia to India and beyond while a different flow with relatively lesser impact on China moved in the opposite direction. Then, in the sixteenth century, sea-borne Europeans began to intrude upon the oceanic commerce of Pacific Asia. Eventually, they exerted unprecedented military and economic pressures on China. The fabled overland Silk Route lost its primacy for bringing distant European influences. Central Asia ceased to be the main source of foreign threats. Just as the warming ocean in the summer causes the winds to shift, sending them rushing toward the continent,



so did the great Pacific carry the gusts of change toward China and East Asia.

Until the nineteenth century, China dominated the region with its continental-centered world view. The Great Wall symbolized this overriding concern with threats, new influences, and opportunities emanating from within the Asian main-

land where, from a very early time, the inhabitants of fertile river valleys competed with one another and with intruding nomadic tribes from the steppe. When at last this vision began to shift toward a recognition that the future lay at the ocean's edge, it symbolized a major turning point in Pacific-Asian history.

1. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. xx.
2. After the very early Spanish influence from the New World had diminished, only the United States in the Western Hemisphere possessed population, resources, and military power on a scale large enough to exert a major influence on the course of Pacific Basin history. Latin American and Canadian interaction with the Pacific have been significant, but like the South Pacific region, they are not discussed in detail in order to contain a topic that is already of unwieldy proportions.
3. Asians did of course cross the Bering land bridge in the late Pleistocene Epoch to begin populating the Americas around thirty thousand years ago.
4. Douglas L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (Cambridge, MA: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, Natural History Library, 1951, 1961), p. 3.
5. The land area that drains into the Pacific Basin is approximately one-fourth the size of the area drained by the Atlantic Ocean even though the Pacific's volume is twice as large. With a globe, it is almost startling to look at the Pacific head-on, for it covers a third of the planet's surface. Its area is greater than that of all the land above sea level and, as such, constitutes a major barrier even in an era of advanced modes of communication and transportation.

## TIME CHART: CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY IN PACIFIC ASIA

Given the extraordinary diversity of Pacific Asia, an overview of the region's chronology to the nineteenth century (to accompany chapter 1) is best obtained without reference to contemporary political boundaries. The map and time chart on the following pages consolidate some of the areas described previously according to subregions whose territories have waxed and waned over the centuries. They roughly correlate with broad geographical features that have promoted their societies' interactions, but they are not intended to represent permanent "culture areas." They are best seen as physical spaces within which it is useful to trace a series of interrelated historical events.

The chart expresses these shifting boundaries and influences: The dominant political forces that occur along the horizontal paths in each region intrude occasionally on other paths. These are indicated whenever a pattern spreads across the chart or jumps briefly into other areas. Space does not permit a detailed time chart for so broad a region. This chart is meant to serve as a conceptual and mnemonic device for understanding concurrent or linked historical trends.

Eleven regions have been selected.\*

**1. The "Barbarian" Northern Border Region** — The steppe region along the shifting northern border of China, including sometimes present-day Manchuria, presented a threat that persisted throughout China's history.

**2. North China/Yellow River Region** — As described in chapter one, North China comprises a distinctive cultural and geographical area based on dry-field farming, mostly wheat and millet.

**3. The Yangzi River Region** — Stretching from the Yangzi to as far as the Xijiang River, this is the "watery," primarily rice-growing region of China.

**4. South China** — The hill and forest dwellers of this region south and west of the Xijiang River spoke different dialects and had little in common with their countrymen to the north.

**5. The Yalu Valley and Korea** — The rugged Korean peninsula and the Yalu River valley further north have supported populations with different linguistic and ethnic origins from those of the Chinese.

**6. The Japan Islands** — The primary receptors of cultural influence from the mainland were the islands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku, with outlying cultural areas being Hokkaido and South Sakhalin.

**7. Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan** — Inhabitants of Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands below Japan were influenced from both Japan and the mainland in their early histories.

**8. Southeast Asia: The Northwest Region** — Highland peoples have coalesced in the plateau area of the Irrawaddy River region, including the area of present-day Burma.

**9. Southeast Asia: The West and Central Region** — The region of the Chao Phraya River delta and the Great Lake, inclusive of present-day Thailand, Cambodia, and part of Laos, is bordered by the Annam mountains.

**10. Southeast Asia: The Eastern Region** — From the Red River delta in the north to the Mekong River delta in the south, this region, comprising present-day Vietnam and part of Laos, fringes the South China Sea.

**11. Lower Malaya and Islands** — Present-day Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines together make up a vast, heterogeneous maritime region whose island groups to the east are especially distinct from those to the west in their history and interactions.

\* See also *Peoples and Places of the Past* (Washington, DC: The National Geographic Society, 1983)

# TIME CHART REGIONS

"BARBARIAN" NORTHERN BORDER REGION

NORTH CHINA

YALU VALLEY  
AND KOREA

JAPANESE  
ISLANDS

YELLOW  
RIVER  
REGION

YANGZI RIVER  
REGION

RYUKYU  
ISLANDS  
AND

TAIWAN

SOUTH CHINA

NORTHWESTERN  
AND WESTERN  
REGION

CENTRAL  
MAINLAND

EASTERN  
MAINLAND

South China Sea

Pacific Ocean

Indian Ocean

LOWER  
MALAYA

AND ISLANDS

90°E.

150°E.

30°N.

