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## **Evaluating the Dynamic Changes in Asian Countries**

Dynamism has been a key word in describing the changes in Asia since at least the mid-19th century. It was Japan that initiated abrupt modernization as the first country on the continent in the Meiji period, in 1868. Profound economic, societal, political, and cultural changes were experienced by a growing number of Asian states after the end of the Second World War. Decolonization, wars in Korea and Vietnam, the emergence of Asian Tigers, Sino-American rapprochement after the Nixon Shock in 1971, and entry of the People's Republic of China on the path of reforms in 1978 attested to the increasing importance of Asia in the global geopolitical landscape. The rise of China, coupled with the economic and political stagnation of Japan, translated into a further change in the power balance in the region after the end of the Cold War. This monograph tries to illustrate different aspects of these complex dynamics.

The first thematic block focuses on the analysis of the US and the EU's changing position in East Asia. It touches upon both the historical legacy of the Cold War and the power shifts in current times. David Jarvis reviews recent publications about the Vietnam War. He concludes that while the analyzed titles put much emphasis on describing the tragedy of the Vietnamese people, they also implied that the atrocities committed by the US may have been an inevitable measure to stop the spread of communism in Asia. Su-chun Li examines the evolution of the Fulbright program in the Republic of Korea. She suggests that despite the fact that the program did not directly influence Seoul's foreign policy, it was potentially instrumental in inculcating such values as freedom, democracy, peace, and self-determination in South Korea. David A. Jones examines

the possibility of building an Anglo-American trade route alternative to China's new silk road plan: maritime corridors from Japan to the Mediterranean Sea or across the Arctic Ocean, as well as a land corridor through Russia. He suggests that without such an initiative, it will be difficult to contain China's rising power. Mateusz Smolaga, in turn, traces anomalies in the EU's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Asian countries. As he stresses, while the EU's targeting generally matched a high ODA to a low Human Development Index (HDI), the EU also used the ODA to pursue its own political and economic goals. The four chapters illustrate the fact that the US, and to a lesser extent the EU, has been unwilling to easily cede ground in Asia to the rising China.

The second thematic block examines China's growing political and economic influence in the world. Amandeep Singh Hanspal analyzes the significance of the Belt & Road Initiative for Kazakhstan and whole of Central Asia. He stresses that while Kazakhstan has been using the Chinese initiative to achieve its own developmental goals, it has been also concerned with the violation of human rights of ethnic Kazakhs and Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Mateusz Chatys examines the evolution of a patron–client relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Philippines. As he concludes, despite the Chinese ambition to replace the US as the main patron of the Philippines, the Philippine society and military elite still display high distrust towards Beijing and high confidence in Washington. Przemysław Ciborek, in turn, analyzes China's growing political and economic presence on the Balkan Peninsula, in particular in Romania. He emphasizes that while Beijing remains an important partner for Bucharest, the asymmetry in bilateral trade exchange pushes Romania towards counterbalancing Chinese influence by reinforcing positive relations with the EU. All three chapters stress China's growing ambition to play a significant role in different parts of the world, but they also indicate the social, humanitarian, political, and economic obstacles to the spread of the Chinese sphere of influence.

While the People's Republic of China has been strengthening its international position, recent decades have witnessed a gradual demise of Japan's relative power. This profound shift in the regional balance of power was accompanied by the dynamic evolution of Japanese democracy, which is examined in the last thematic block. Jinghao Zhou compares the practice of Confucianism in China and Japan. He concludes that while the Chinese Communist Party has used Confucianism to justify its legitimacy,

the Japanese version of Confucianism has served to support democratization, maintaining harmonious social order, and enhancing the free-market oriented economy. Sylwia Łagnowska analyzes the evolution of hereditary parliamentarism in Japan. She links the existence of political dynasties in that country not only to institutional factors, such as the electoral system that was changed in 1994, but also to cultural and historical determinants. Karol Żakowski, in turn, examines the growing importance of political and prime ministerial leadership in Japan. As he emphasizes, while the former concept was aimed at redressing the collusion between the dominant party and civil servants, the latter's goal was to impose top-down leadership both on the bureaucrats and the Liberal Democratic Party backbenchers. The three papers draw attention to the fact that Japanese liberal democracy has been heavily influenced by Asian values.

While the book chapters touch upon diverse problems, they all illustrate the dynamic changes that occurred on the Asian continent in recent decades. By describing different dimensions of the politics, foreign policies, societies, and economics of Asian countries, they contribute to a better understanding of the complex mosaic of the intertwining interests of global and local powers in the region.