

# Asia Perspectives 2014

## *The Asian Century*

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Throughout the twentieth century, the West mediated and shaped modes of knowledge production in Asian societies and their self-understandings. Perceived as a European construct, interpreted as a contrast to 'European' or 'Western,' the remaking of 'Asia' actually began in the last century with the slogan "Asia for the Asiatics," essentially revolving around the evolution of the concept of Pan-Asianism. However, it is the resilience of the Asian economies in the face of global downturn, which led to the identification of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the Asian century. It was predicted that in addition to being the most populous region in the world, Asia would also be the world's largest producer of goods and services as well as the world's largest consumer. An increasingly wealthy and mobile middle class was emerging that would demand a diverse range of goods and services from health and aged care to education, household goods, tourism, banking and financial services thereby creating transformative opportunities for the rest of the world. The 2007 World Bank report on globalization noted that rising education levels in Asia would be important boosting Asian growth on an average of 0.75% to 2% points. This rapid expansion of human capital through quality education throughout Asia would lead to significantly higher life expectancy and economic growth and even to higher quality of institutions and the transition to modern democracies.

What remains under emphasized in the course of discussions on the Asian century is that Asia as an idea has been constantly evolving and changing dramatically over the years making the conception of an integrated Asia hard to define. There is consensus on the fact that Asia is not a civilization--- but a conglomeration of diverse regions and that ideas of Asian "culture" and a set of Asian "values" as a singularly defined coherent alternative does not exist. Similarly Asia does not adhere to a particular notion of an ideal state. The Asian century was essentially formulated on the basis of developments in certain parts of Asia ---the remarkable economic growth in East and South East Asia,

emerging significance of China and India in global affairs and rapid positive demographic trends as compared to the rest of the world. Asia's success story, however, overlooked failed states, struggling economies, dysfunctional infrastructure and disparities in the distribution of resources. Large parts of Asia were mired in issues of sectarian violence, governance, legitimacy, dignity and security of human life, racism and intolerance in stark contrast to the expectations of Asia as an emerging model. The challenge that faces an industrializing and democratizing Asia is two-fold. On the one hand, the forces of marketization and commercialization have overwhelmed communities and eroded their ethical traditions. On the other hand, Asian nations face short-term and long-term political tasks. The short term task is to establish conditions conducive to a steadier and unwavering process of democratization and the entrenchment of human rights while the long term task is to develop norms for human rights and democratic politics that are rooted in traditional cultures as well as capture contemporary Asian aspirations.

The ruptures/fault lines and regional differences offer opportunities and alternatives that encourage engagement. The economic dynamism of Asia has provided a valuable site for the development of theory and empirical understanding in contemporary economic geography. International migration has acquired/attained an unprecedented scale and diversity and political, economic, social and demographic significance in Asia over the last decade. The coinage of the term 'Eastphalia' signifies attempts to capture the potential for Asian countries to reshape international politics, international law and global governance in the twenty-first century. Thus, based on projections of Asian performance in various spheres there remains the necessity to engage with a number of issues:

1. The Remaking of Asia—Pan Asianism revisited
2. Intellectual/Reform movements across Asia
3. Routes and Roads—Strategizing Asia
4. Measuring Asia's globalization—financial transformation, infrastructure, innovation and technological development
5. Ecology and Sustainable Development
6. Leadership and legitimacy, governance and institutions
7. Changing Landscapes across Asia— demography, migration and urbanization
8. India and China in the Asian century
9. Global engagement with the Asian century—the Australian initiative