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Brantly Womack, With contributions by Wang Gungwu,
Wu Yu-Shan, Qin Yaqing, Evelyn Goh
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Recentering Pacific Asia

The Pacific Rim of Asia – Pacific Asia – is now the world’s largest and most cohesive economic region, and China has returned to its center. China’s global outlook is shaped by its regional experience, first as a premodern Asian center, then displaced by Western-oriented modernization, and now returning as a central producer and market in a globalized region. Developments since 2008 have been so rapid that future directions are uncertain, but China’s presence, population, and production guarantee it a key role. As a global competitor, China has awakened American anxieties and the US-China rivalry has become a major concern for the rest of the world. However, rather than facing a power transition between hegemons, the US and China are primary nodes in a multi-layered, interconnected global matrix that neither can control. Brantly Womack argues that Pacific Asia is now the key venue for working out a new world order.

BRANTLY WOMACK is Senior Faculty Fellow at UVA’s Miller Center and Emeritus Professor of Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *Asymmetry and International Relationships* (Cambridge, 2015), *China among Unequals: Asymmetric International Relationships in Asia* (World Scientific Press, 2010), and *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge, 2006).

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Recentering Pacific Asia

Regional China and World Order

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Author and Commentators

Brantly Womack is Professor Emeritus of Politics at the University of Virginia and Senior Faculty Fellow at the Miller Center. His interest in the general dynamics of Chinese domestic development and international relationships has led to a number of books, including *Asymmetry and International Relationships*, *China among Unequals: Asymmetric International Relationships in Asia*, *China's Rise in Historical Perspective*, and *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*. Most recently his research has focused on China's re-emergence and its implications.

Commentators

Chapter 2: **Wang Gungwu** is a legendary historian of China and its external relationships. He began his studies with research on the evolving structure of power between the Tang and Song dynasties, and his later research encompassed the Chinese diaspora, and the linkage of traditional and contemporary notions of China's role. Recent publications include his two-volume autobiography which relates his personal experience of growing up as an overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and the book *China Reconnects: Joining a Deep-rooted Past to a New World Order*. Wang is the founding director of the East Asia Institute of National University of Singapore and is University Professor there. Before moving to Singapore he was Vice-Chancellor of Hong Kong University, and prior to that Director of Australian National University's Research School of Asian and Pacific Studies.

Chapter 3: **Wu Yu-Shan** is Academician and Distinguished Research Fellow of Taiwan's Academia Sinica and founding director of its Institute of Political Science, as well as Professor of Political Science at National Taiwan University. He is a leading scholar on comparative political development in Asian politics, European communism, and cross-Strait politics. Recent books include *The Chinese Models*

of Development: Global, Local and Comparative Perspectives and Resurgence of China: A Dialogue between History and International Relations (in Chinese).

Chapter 4: **Qin Yaqing** is Emeritus President of China Foreign Affairs University, Chancellor of the Diplomatic Academy, and one of China's pre-eminent theorists of international relationships. He is a member of the Foreign Policy Advisory Group of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Qin translated Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* into Chinese. His book, *A Relational Theory of International Politics*, was published by Princeton in 2018. Qin is particularly interested in the globalization of international relations theory.

Chapter 5: **Evelyn Goh** is the Shedden Professor of Strategic Policy Studies and Director of Research at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at Australian National University. She is a leading expert on the changing political and diplomatic contours of East Asia. Her work on the hedging strategies of China's neighbors is well known. Goh recently co-authored (with Barry Buzan) *Re-thinking Sino-Japanese Alienation: History Problems and Historical Opportunities*, and current projects include "*Strategic Diplomacy*" in the 21st Century.

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of fifty years of learning from Asia scholarship, and from interaction with Asian friends in Asian contexts as well as with American and European friends. It is not predictive, since one of the basic lessons of the past fifty years has been that China, Pacific Asia, and their relationship to the world have changed, sometimes dramatically and unexpectedly. China's domestic developments have encompassed the pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping, the trauma of Tiananmen, the institutionalizing efforts of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, followed by the de-institutionalizing personalism of Xi Jinping – what is next? In terms of foreign affairs, we have witnessed China's admission to the UN and general diplomatic normalization, the shift of Taiwan policy from liberation to peaceful reunification, followed by the transition in Taiwan to democracy and Taiwanese identity, not to mention the intertwined mushrooming of the Chinese and Pacific Asian economies and regional reconfiguration since 2008. Anyone who has lived through these transformations knows better than to simply assume the present and to expect more of the same.

Despite the unpredictability of these transformations, none of them were random accidents. Each one, in retrospect, was related to the prior massing of both resources and problems, and to the perceptions of populations, elites, and leaderships regarding their situations and options. Not only were the leaders sometimes surprised and disappointed by these developments, but even the success of a project like Deng Xiaoping's "reform and openness" would lead to new situations and new challenges. As the history of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) shows, continuity requires adaptability. It is tempting to fall back on the familiar distinction of "continuity and change," but, in fact, continuity and change are inextricably intertwined in the actions of the present, in what is attempted, and in what actually succeeds.

The premise of this book is that we are in the long present of a new era. Although I date the beginning of the era at 2008, that is to say fifteen years before my current writing, it is such a massive change in the world order that we have yet to grasp its implications. The United States remains the leading power in economics, politics, and security, but clearly it is not in control. The developing world, with China as its avatar, is not replacing the developed world, but it is displacing the massiveness of its presence. The era of Western modernization is shading into something else, with Pacific Asia playing a major, and possibly a leading, role. And with China already risen, Putin's invasion of Ukraine splitting Eurasia, and the Cold War mentality in the United States, we may already be moving into Act Two of the twenty-first century's reconfiguration.

The dynamics and questions regarding the Pacific Asian region help shape the agenda of the global prospect, and this book is an attempt to rethink the elements of the past and present that shape its real options. Of course, China, Pacific Asia, and their new global roles are not the only factors shaping world order, but they are important, and they are the ones that I know best. A rethinking is necessary for all concerned. For China, the return to regional pre-eminence has resonances with its traditional centrality, but not the Empire as sanitized and glorified by Chinese popular memory. What were the extent and limits of traditional centrality? How was centrality lost? What does it mean to again become central to a modernized and international region? What to do about Greater China? For Pacific Asia, how to relate to a peacefully risen, but very, very large, China? And how to relate regionally to a China now in global rivalry with the United States? For the United States, China certainly presents challenges to America's global role and to its self-confidence, but is China a challenger? Is proportional change in the global political economy necessarily threatening? Is American leadership adaptable, or is it condemned to a retro mentality of making itself great again? For the rest of the developing and developed world, what difference does greater connectivity and agency make in a world that again has two global powers? If these questions are not rethought, the default answers are likely to be a confusion of backward steps from the present into a misunderstood future, steps shaped by the changing ground on which they tread, but as likely to stumble as to make progress.

What I am offering are rethinkings rather than answers, and my first debts are to the four preeminent scholars who have contributed their thoughts to the volume. Wang Gungwu is probably everyone's favorite historian of China; certainly he is mine. Wu Yu-Shan is the founding director of the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica in Taipei, and we have had a long collaborative relationship. Qin Yaqing is China's pre-eminent theorist of international relationships, and we have enjoyed many wide-ranging discussions of philosophy and contemporary foreign policy. Evelyn Goh is a leading researcher of the international relationships of Pacific Asia whose analyses of current developments are particularly valuable. Together, they bring a diverse Pacific Asian reality to these rethinkings.

My next level of debts is to those who made possible the original lecture series at the University of Virginia during the fall of 2021. Heading the list is Dorothy Wong, the Director of the East Asia Center, without whose enthusiasm and support the project would not have been launched. Then come the people who made it happen: Jamie McConnell, who funded the Center's lecture series, and Brian Murphy, who mastered the mechanics of hybrid presentations before present and virtual audiences. Steve Mull, Harry Harding, Len Schoppa, and Amitav Acharya each chaired one of the four sessions and added their own insights. And the large and persevering audiences gave me confidence to proceed to authoring the book. The Miller Center, UVA Global, and the Politics Department also supported the series.

As its six chapters rather than four lectures suggest, the book is a much expanded project. To have presented the big ideas in the lectures was important for my own thinking, but the book's more formal and deliberate explication was a major task. I was aided by indefatigable friends who commented on each chapter. A cluster of my former students, now professors in their own right, were most helpful: Paige Tan, Alice Ba, Kate Kaup, Shino Watanabe, April Herlevi, and Prashanth Parameshwaran. And other friends also provided their encouragement and comments: John Brandon, Ren Xiao, Wei Ling, Clemens Ostergaard, Harry Harding, and Shirley Lin. I also profited from discussions with Chas Freeman, Ed Luce, Josh Eisenman, Julie Chen, Allen Lynch, Dale Copeland, Tayyab Safdar, John Robinson, Dongryul Kim, CC Kuik, Shaun Breslin, and Mike Lampton. While no one but me is to blame for the result, any particular good idea or nuance is likely to show their influence.

Acknowledgements

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This is my fourth book with Cambridge University Press, and it was a pleasure to work with John Haslam, Carrie Parkinson, Robert Judkins, Sarah Norman, and Amala Gobiraman. I also deeply appreciate the support of the two anonymous external reviewers.

Always last but never least, the support of my family was and remains essential. The project consumed my waking hours and my energies, and my retirement from teaching in June 2021 merely concentrated my focus. Without the love and aid of my wife Ann, my

daughter, Sarah, and, at a greater distance, David, Alice and Otto, I would have either given up or starved to death.

But back to my initial acknowledgements. As China and Pacific Asia were transformed over the past half-century, I was transformed as well. Whatever value these rethinkings have is owed to those who made possible my contact with Pacific Asia. The years of Covid have been a painful reminder of how important personal experience and travel are to one's life and thinking. I hope that connectivity will return, for me and for all.

Note on the Cover Map

The map on the cover is the earliest map of the Pacific Asian region. It was painted at the beginning of the seventeenth century, possibly to decorate a merchant's villa as a display of his routes of trade. The main routes are here highlighted in red by Dr. Hongping Annie Nie, and they show an intricate pattern of regional trade reaching from Japan and Korea to the Indonesian islands, with one heading westward through the Malaccan Strait, including directions as far as Aden and Hormuz. The Fujian trading metropolis of Quanzhou is shown with eighteen routes connecting to sixty ports.

The map is transitional in every respect. It demonstrates the diminishing ability of the Ming Dynasty to control regional relationships with the tribute system. However, its focus on intraregional trade is about to be supplanted by the splintered globalism of Western modernization. Regional relationships have returned in the current era, but as a distinctive part of a changing world order.

The map was donated to Oxford's Bodleian Library in 1659 by John Selden, and remained unnoticed until its rediscovery by Robert Batchelor in 2008. Since its rediscovery it has been considered one of the most important premodern Chinese maps.