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## *Book Reviews*



T.J. Pempel, *A Region of Regimes: Prosperity and Plunder in the Asia-Pacific*, Cornell University Press, 2021. 252 pp. ISBN: 9781501758805.

*A Region of Regimes* is one of the last manuscripts in the Cornell Studies in Political Economy series, which was skilfully edited by Peter Katzenstein and Roger Haydon for more than forty years. T.J. Pempel, the author, has himself been an important contributor to the series, with seminal works on East Asian political economy published on specific countries (for example, *Regime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of the Japanese Political Economy*, 1998) and making sense of particular events, or ‘critical junctures’, such as the East Asian Financial Crisis and the Global Financial Crisis (*Two Crises: Different Outcomes: East Asia and Global Finance*, 2014). He also published thematic accounts of the region’s political economy in the series, including *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region* (2005).

In this latest book, Pempel offers a capstone of his decades of researching and writing about East Asian political economy. He develops an analytical framework for studying the region, one that is more wide-reaching in the sense that he is covering ten (very different) countries across the political, economic and security realms. He organises the region into three clusters of regime types: (1) the ‘developmental regimes’ of Japan, Korea and Taiwan, (2) the ‘ersatz developmental regimes’ (‘ersatz’ means an inferior substitute good) of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, and (3) the ‘rapacious regimes’ of the Philippines, North Korea and Myanmar.

The three regime components are ‘state institutions, its socioeconomic forces, and external forces’ (p. 4). By ‘state institutions’, Pempel refers to the bureaucracies that lead industrial policy efforts, such as Japan’s post-war Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which Chalmers Johnson detailed in his developmental state classic, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982). He operationalises socioeconomic forces in terms of state–society relations, drawing on state-centric notions, such as Peter Evans’ (1995) concept

of ‘embedded autonomy’, as well as broader institutional accounts, such as Hall and Soskice’s *Varieties of Capitalism*. The point being that ‘socioeconomic forces’ informs Pempel’s broadly aimed study of the nexus of the state institutions and society. External forces, for their part, cover all non-domestic influences; this includes other nation-states and supranational organisations, but also global structures, technological paradigms and their steady shaping influences.

Pempel’s efforts to codify and explain the differential trajectories in East Asia will be of interest to political economy scholars, as well as area specialists and all those intrigued by the ‘developmental state’. East Asia, especially Japan, is the clear archetype of the developmental state, characterised for its coordination of economic activities, role in upgrading human capital, and support for export-led growth while minimising inbound competition.

With the different regimes, Pempel shows that East Asian studies must be greeted with an understanding that cross-national and temporal differences are endemic, rather than simply associated with ‘developmental state: yes or no’. In comparative terms, he notes that the export-led growth experience so often associated with the East Asian miracle is unique to just a few countries, over a specific period of time. Other pathways include the ersatz developmental regimes, for instance, which relied on inward foreign direct investment (FDI) in order to participate in global supply chains, but face challenges presented by the middle-income trap (coincidentally, Pempel uses MIT to refer to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand; it is of course also the moniker for the middle-income trap).

Temporally, Pempel asserts that each country has changed—often significantly—over time. As a result, even the models for which countries have become synonymous, such as Japan’s post-war developmental state, have not necessarily been true for decades. To update this, in the second part of the book, Pempel offers a ‘reconstructed developmental’ regime type, typified by Japan, Korea and Taiwan, acknowledging the change since they first achieved their economic miracles in the twentieth century. Rather than effective merit-based state institutions, cohesion and strong business support during the developmental period, these same states are now depicted as having partisan and industrial fragmentation, and thus an economic paradigm that impedes development.

He also—and crucially, given its weight in the global political economy—brings China into the analytical frame as a ‘composite regime’. As other China scholars note, it is ultimately unique for a number of reasons, not least its size, political institutions and position in the international order. But a strength of the book is Pempel’s effort to compare China with different regime types in

East Asia, characterising its state institutions as concentrated, with party–state control and minimal independent business, high human skills and selective globalisation. Unlike the ‘developmental regime’, Pempel notes China’s dependence on inward FDI (like the ersatz developmental regimes) and powerful Communist Party (like the rapacious regimes) (pp. 143–144). Similar to the classic developmental state, though, are the rapid sophistication, deep industrialisation and human capital upgrading.

Collectively, Pempel offers a comprehensive framework for studying East Asia, from its developmental miracles to those mired in the middle-income trap or persistent repressive regimes, to the Chinese juggernaut. In this way, *A Region of Regimes* constitutes a valuable tool for holistically studying the political economy of the region, beyond more focused accounts of East Asian business systems and capitalism (e.g. Walter and Zhang 2012; Whitely and Zhang 2016; Witt and Redding 2013), China (e.g. Ang 2016, 2020; Fuller 2016), or the long-debated persistence or death of the developmental state (Pacheco Pardo and Klingler-Vidra 2019; Carroll and Jarvis 2017; Thurbon 2016; Yueng 2016). This comprehensive account is befitting of a final installment in the Cornell Studies in Political Economy series.

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