

Introduction

*Malcolm J. M. Cooper, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University
Chief Editor*

In this issue of *Asia Pacific World*, our sixth overall, we feature an inspirational speech from a Nobel laureate. We then offer six general articles covering a wide range of topics, as well as an assortment of book reviews.

The featured article is a transcript of a speech given by 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus at the Journal's parent IAAPS launch event in 2010. In it, Professor Yunus talks about the inspiration behind the micro-credit organization he established, the Grameen Bank, and the struggles he faced in getting it off the ground. He relates how every step of the way he had to combat conventional thinking on banking, bank lending and collateral. Professor Yunus offers an interesting perspective on the nature of poverty, and presents many diverse ideas of how to combat it by thinking in unconventional ways. He states that real progress will eventually require a new paradigm (a "big jump"), and challenges his audience to continue his work by seeking new ways to solve the problems causing poverty today.

The General Articles

The first general article is from Philip Streich, who takes us back to Japan's Warring States Period to see how the events that unfolded measure up against present formulations of balance of power theory. The balance of power eventually failed to hold during this era (as the warlords Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, in succession, overcame their rivals to reunite Japan), and Streich looks at what factors allowed this to happen. In particular, he focuses on the impacts of four of these: proximity to the threat from a rival; the presence of multiple domination seekers at critical periods; lack of trust between allies; and the magnitude of power of the hegemonic threat. Streich analyzes how each of these factors resulted in ineffective attempts to "balance" the activities of the eventual uniters by their warlord rivals.

Next, Wylma Samaranayake-Robinson looks in the opposite direction: to the future. Delving into futures studies, she presents four possible scenarios for a future Myanmar in the year 2040. Getting ideas from both literature review and an opinion-based survey of citizens native to Myanmar (primarily expatriates and students studying abroad) and others with an interest in the country, Samaranayake-Robinson postulates four very different,



but viable, possible futures for Myanmar. These possible futures include a society that has collapsed into social disorder, with divided rule by local strongmen; a society which has reverted to traditional Buddhist values; and a technologically-controlled “ubiquitous society.” In the article the reader is encouraged to set aside the preconceived notion that a Myanmar which does not become a democracy is “doomed.”

Also anticipating the future, but a much nearer-term one, Fred Schumann analyzes the changes about to take place on the island of Guam due to the mass relocation of U.S. military assets from Okinawa, Japan. Schumann’s focus is the impact base relocations will have on the current tourism industry of Guam, which is already being affected by the changing demographics of its largest source market: Japan. Using the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia (which went through similar changes) as a case study, Schumann looks at many factors, including the changing labor market, environmental impact, and even travel visa restrictions which may be implemented as part of expected security enhancements on the island. He advises Guam’s tourism industry stakeholders to be proactive and “think ahead,” doing what they can to anticipate change in an admittedly rather unpredictable situation.

The paper by Motoko Tanaka continues this volume’s concentration on future themes, but futures with a decided grounding in past events. Tanaka analyzes apocalyptic fiction in Japan, and in particular how it has evolved since 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings continue to have a psychological impact on the Japanese, which is reflected in the numerous works of popular science fiction which depict future cities devastated by nuclear wars. Tanaka looks at a cross-section of media (animation, comic books and “light novels”) and traces how modern Japanese sociopolitical phenomena (such as the “*hikikomori*,” who turn inward and pull away from society) have impacted apocalyptic fiction. Oddly, in many works, society and even the “Others” bringing about the apocalypse are mostly ignored, and in their place the inner psychological world of the main character is explored. Much of the fiction is defeatist, which Tanaka attributes to a resigned belief among the Japanese that the U.S. is an undefeatable enemy.

The following article, by Abhik Chakraborty, continues to trace the influence of the past on the present and future, but turns our attention to the state of the natural environment in Japan as typified by the condition of its river basins. The environmental debacle that was Japan during its economic growth years saw an enormous amount of human interference in the hydrology and shape of river basins, notably through encasement of river beds in concrete and widespread damming of streams. But even today, in an era of environmental awareness and activism, when it comes to basin governance there is a gap between the rhetoric of environmental conservation and actual implementation. Chakraborty’s investigation leads him to place some of the blame on an influential design and governance ethic, which on the surface seems to promote environmentalism, but ultimately, he concludes, is rooted in the engineer’s vision of the need to ‘construct’ river basin landscapes in order to protect people and property, thus hindering the return to natural forms.

Our final article in this issue is from Suminto Sastrosuwito, who looks at the performance of the Indonesian banking system subsequent to the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998. In an attempt to recover, the Indonesian authorities introduced some key interventions and policy reforms to improve banking system performance and soundness. Sastrosuwito's study investigates the development of the market structure and performance of the post-crisis Indonesian banking system, covering the period 2000 to 2008. The empirical findings suggest that the market structure improved, indicated by declining bank concentration and increased competition, but that there was a slight decline in productivity growth.

The Book Reviews

The book reviews in this issue cover a broad variety of topics, across East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific. Topics covered include authentic Neapolitan pizza in Japan; the tea trade between Fujian, China and Singapore in the 20th century; the Red Shirt movement in Thailand; and a study of the response to HIV in Papua New Guinea. This time we also include a review article, by Ehito Kimura, covering four books about the recent political situation in Indonesia (post-Suharto). We felt that such a review article would give more depth on this particularly important topic in the Asia Pacific region. Kimura concludes that, from these works, we are left with an uncertain view about the prospects for Indonesia's future: although political reforms have proved resilient, institutions such as the legislature are increasingly viewed as inept and self-serving, threatening democratic legitimacy.

Biography

Malcolm J. M. Cooper is the Chief Editor of *Asia Pacific World*. He is also Professor Emeritus of Tourism Management and Environmental Law at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.