

## REZENSIONEN

### Ellen L. Frost: *Asia's New Regionalism*

Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008. 292 S., EUR 28,99

The number of books on Asia's regionalism, regionalization, regional integration etc. abound. They analyze trade and investment relations in search for growing interdependency; focus on security hot spots and look for an emerging new regional security architecture; observe the rising power of China and India; analyse the various old and new regional organizations such as APEC, ASEAN, SCO; compare the trends of regionalization with Europe; or focus on single countries in the region. There are many comparative studies; they explore political systems, or paths of economic development. Historical studies focus on the connections within the region and on parallels and mutual influence in societal development. The California School asks the controversial question why at some point Europe progressed and (East) Asia stagnated. There are books on religions and schools of thought in Asia. The Asian values debate has been led very emotionally, revealing a growing sense of self-awareness of Asians. Lately, studies on governance in Asia have been added. It is not surprising that we now see a deepening of the field; research becomes more specialized and focused. It seems increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to squeeze information about so many and diverse societies from so many disciplinary perspectives into one book. On the other hand, we need researchers who dare to provide such a general perspective, lest we lose the overview.

Hence, a book with the title "Asia's New Regionalism" is very welcome. But it will be met by potential readers with some scepti-

cism: Does the author offer anything new? Is she able to provide a new perspective on the complex processes in the region?

The book begins where it should: with a definition of "Asia". This is a controversial but crucial issue. Opinions necessarily differ. Frost argues that neither the various geographical definitions including "Monsoon Asia" and "Eurasia" nor those that are mirrors of history like "Indochina", "Farther India", "Dutch East Indies", "Orient" etc. are acceptable. She shows how the definition of "Asia" rolled eastward, until by the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became almost synonymous with "East Asia". Now, as she argues, it is time to move back from this extreme position, to include India, and to move China southward.

Frost picks up Norton Ginsburg's term "Asian Asia" that includes the southern and eastern margins of the continent. This corresponds largely with her own proposal of "Maritime Asia", a term she borrowed from historian Takeshi Hamashita. She defines Maritime Asia as the "vast sweep of coastline and water connecting central and southern India, Southeast Asia, China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand". A political construct used by Frost is "Asia Major", consisting of ASEAN plus three (China, South Korea, Japan) plus another three (India, Australia, New Zealand).

The argument that "East Asia" is no longer sufficient is presented convincingly. However, substituting this by "Asia" only to be able to include India, Australia and New Zealand creates uneasiness for a number of reasons. "Asia" is even more unspecific than other terms and will, in the form proposed by Frost, hardly find support among specialists on Western and Central Asia. And the support for including a counterweight to China plus two American allies raises suspi-

cion of political motives, which is not too far-fetched given Frost's personal background. Whether the terms "Maritime Asia" or "Asia Major" will be accepted by the academic community and the public remains to be seen.

Such considerations aside, Frost develops a compelling matrix for her analysis, consisting of two concepts of the region and two driving forces: Maritime Asia where integration takes place spontaneously by continuous and growing interaction, and Asia Major where there is a government-driven quest for closer (formal) integration. This complex and flexible analytical construct is creative and inspiring; it differs markedly from the often one-dimensional and linear approach in other books. Frost also rightly points at the different meaning of such terms as regionalization, regionalism, regional integration, and regional community building.

The next three chapters focus on Maritime Asia and provide details on the spontaneous, bottom-up forces that shape this region. After a brief outline of Maritime Asia's history, Frost describes the revival of this region, the new opportunities created there in particular through technological development, and how these are used by its people.

The next part of the book deals with Asia Major, the political construct. Three chapters introduce the major members and their various attempts at forming alliances or other forms of institutionalized cooperation; focus on the most prominent of these, in particular ASEAN plus 3 or 6; and remind us of the economic dimension of international relations, in particular trade and finance.

The last three chapters discuss the relevance of Asia's integration, obstacles and risk factors, and an outlook into the future, including advice on how to deal with a possible exclusion of the United States.

Inevitably, filling the complex analytical matrix as described above (Maritime

Asia/spontaneous development plus Asia Major/targeted policy measures) with life on just 250 pages of text requires substantial shortening. Specialists on religious studies will find it odd that Buddhism in Maritime Asia is described on less than one page (89), and Japan specialists will be surprised to see that the pioneering role of Japan is dealt with on only half of a page (80).

While the book does have a well designed and transparent analytical framework, the latter is not associated with any single discipline such as International Relations, Political Economy or Economics. Interdisciplinarity has its merits and its shortcomings; however, none of these is discussed in the book, so that the reader is sometimes left dumbfounded as to what exactly the author is looking at.

Another principal weakness of the book is the explicitly stated and implicitly detectable U.S. perspective. This is no surprise if we consider that the author has been working for various U.S. government agencies throughout her career; there is a possible normative bias that will have to be considered by readers in particular in Europe, but also in Asia. As for the details, many readers will find it cumbersome that there are only endnotes, and that these are positioned at the end of each chapter. This makes looking up this additional and often important information unnecessarily laborious.

In sum, this book is certainly worth reading, in particular by those who already possess knowledge about the region, have their own ideas about its composition, and who are looking for another perspective for interpreting and sorting the available information. It is not well suited as an introductory textbook; for this purpose, a more linear structure and more details on the single countries, alliances and methodological concepts would have been necessary. Rather, it would be a good supplementary reading in an advanced course on regionalism and concepts of the (East) Asian region, in particular as the base for a controversial dis-

cussion among graduate students. Policy makers will find the broad scope and the concise information on important factors helpful, should however be aware of the above mentioned normative undercurrent.

Rüdiger Frank

### **Kishore Mahbubani. Die Rückkehr Asiens. Das Ende der westlichen Dominanz**

Berlin: Propyläen, 2008. 334 S, EUR 22,90

Der Westen ist an allem schuld:

„Einer der brilliantesten Intellektuellen Asiens“ preist der *Spiegel* den Autor auf dem Einband. Anscheinend kennt der *Spiegel* nicht viele Intellektuelle in Asien. Das Buch ist ein überlanges polemisches Traktat, keine intellektuelle Glanzleistung. Mahbubani, ein gebürtiger Inder, der Singapur als Botschafter bei den Vereinten Nationen vertrat und mittlerweile die Lee Kuan Yew Schule für Regierungsführung leitet, hat sich einen Namen als vielschreibender Kolumnist auf den Meinungsseiten amerikanischer Zeitungen gemacht, wo er den Aufstieg Asiens bejubelt und den Abstieg des Westens, den er für das meiste Übel der Welt verantwortlich macht, genüßlich beschreibt. Sein intellektuelles Strickmuster ist also ein recht schlichtes, genug um Aufsehen zu erregen und gute Verkaufszahlen einzufahren. Wie in seinen früheren Büchern ist auch sein aktueller Band zum gleichen Thema ein etwas wirr gegliedertes Potpourri, in dem sich Anekdoten, langatmige Zitate, unangenehme Wahrheiten und propagandistische Fiktionen munter abwechseln.

Nach Mahbubani hat der Westen zwar historische Meriten, indem er moderne Technologien, demokratische Regierungsformen, die Marktwirtschaft und kritisches, wissenschaftliches Denken erfand und weltweit verbreitete. Schließlich spricht und schreibt der Autor auch auf Englisch, eine Kolonialsprache, nur mit deren Hilfe er sich mit

seinen chinesischen und malaischen Landsleuten verständlich machen kann. Doch mittlerweile hat Asien auf- und überholt. Es modernisiert durch die Übernahme der positiven Elemente des Westens – als da sind die Rechtsstaatlichkeit, die Massenbildung, der ideologische Pragmatismus etc. – ohne dabei zu verwestlichen.

Auf seinen unaufhaltsamen relativen Abstieg reagiert der Westen, der mal als USA, mal als Europa, gelegentlich als beides definiert wird, mit trotziger Verweigerung und jeder Menge politischen Versagens. Er ist protektionistisch, zettelt illegale Kriege an (Kosovo, Irak), und ist für die Erderwärmung und die Weltarmut verantwortlich. Im Gegensatz dazu sind die Asiaten, vor allem China und Indien, friedliebende, sozial und ökologisch verantwortliche internationale Musterschüler. Deshalb sollte die Überrepräsentanz des Westens in den internationalen Organisationen, vor allem im Sicherheitsrat der VN, in der Weltbank und im IWF abgebaut und ihre Leitung in asiatische Hände übergehen. Asien verfüge ohnehin über die größten Devisenreserven der Welt. Die Legitimität des Sicherheitsrates bestünde nur darin, wer den letzten Krieg gewonnen habe. Die Briten und Franzosen sollten ihre Sitze zugunsten eines gemeinsamen EU Sitzes räumen. Dafür sollten Indien und Japan Sitz und Vetorechte erhalten (S. 270).

Auch sonst spricht er in seiner zornigen Philippika gelegentliche Wahrheiten aus. So habe der Westen die Demokratie „ikonisiert“. In einem ideologischen Kreuzzug soll sie überallhin exportiert werden, unabhängig vom Entwicklungsstand einer Gesellschaft (S. 12). Kulturelle Unterschiede zu leugnen und die Demokratie für universell zu halten, sei ein arrogantes Fehlurteil des Westens (S. 58). Tatsächlich könne die Demokratisierung (Jugoslawien, Indonesien) Haß gegen Minderheiten entfesseln, oder in der arabischen Welt islamische Fundamentalisten an die Macht bringen. Ohnehin nehme es der Westen mit seinen hehren Prinzipien nicht so