
Reviewed by Jerry McBeath  
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The subject of this volume is *why* and *how* states cooperate to address environmental problems, with a special focus on Northeast and Southeast Asia. The editor, Paul Harris, a political scientist at Hong Kong’s Lingnan University, introduces the twelve chapters, divided into two parts. The first part examines “issues, themes, and actors.” Lorraine Elliott suggests a framework for analyzing the relationship between resource scarcity and security. Paul Harris examines environmental security from the perspective of US foreign policy toward Northeast Asia. Jack Barkenbus treats the relationship between trade and international environmental cooperation. Morten Boas studies the Asian Development Bank, its adoption of environmental requirements, and political reactions. Giok Ling Ooi, Simon Tay, and Yue Choong Kog evaluate the impact of national economic interests on development of environmental agreements in Southeast Asia, using Singapore as a case study. Then, Donald Brown reviews recent Chinese environmental problems such as global warming, from the analytical perspective of distributive justice.

The six essays in Part II focus more directly on regime building and regional cooperation efforts. Sangmin Nam describes ecological interdependence and environmental governance in Northeast Asia, while Shin-wha Lee focuses more narrowly on the construction of environmental regimes in this area. Wakana Takahashi uses the case of acid rain to illustrate difficulties of environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia. Stephanie Tai, Andrew Loewenstein, Todd Bissett, and Eric O’Malley then turn to the issues nuclear reprocessing presents for East Asian environmental cooperation. Tom Naess discusses the politics of the littoral states to the South China Sea (one of the world’s dirtiest). Finally, Allen Springer evaluates the regional and global attention given the Indonesian forest fires of 1997–98, without production of significant institutional change.

The volume does consider a broad range of global environmental issues, and presents information on a large number of environmental agreements. Too, the volume attempts comprehensive assessments of regional changes, yet what
“Asia Pacific” means, as a region, seems to vary from author to author. Sometimes Taiwan is included, other times not. Russia, too, is treated inconsistently.

Although the states of the Asia Pacific region have entered into discussions and signed a few environmental agreements, the region as a whole is at the elementary stage in development of environmental regimes. Why, given the transboundary nature of environmental problems such as climate change, acid rain, and ocean pollution, has so little international cooperation developed? The book’s subtitle promises a focus on politics in the region, but one notes little systematic inquiry into the political and economic impediments to greater regional integration on environmental issues. The reviewer expected to see some discussion of differences in political structure and process. For example, two states remain under the control of Leninist parties (North Korea and China), and with the exception of Japan, the others are either authoritarian or relatively new democracies. Cross-strait tension between China and Taiwan has continued for more than 50 years. The region contains the world’s fastest growing economies, but there is important variation in level of growth and distribution of income. The United States overshadows regional political and economic development and has the capacity to disrupt progressive change depending on the policy interest of the moment.

Although several authors make reference to the extensive literature on regime formation, not much is done to relate this literature to the specific challenges and opportunities that Northeast and Southeast Asia present. For instance, Peter Haas spells out five factors necessary for the development of regional environmental cooperation—involvement of international institutions, national leadership, participation of transnational scientific networks, active NGOs, and public awareness and concern (cited on pp. 213–14). Comparative analysis of the dimensions suggested by Haas or other scholars would have aided our understanding of why this region has been slow to develop cooperative agreements and institutions.

Of course, most collections of essays can be faulted for a lack of unifying themes. This criticism aside, readers will find much of interest and value in the volume.


Reviewed by Dagmar D. Lohan

Although knowledge surrounding the loss of biodiversity is incomplete, states agreed that measures needed to be taken to preserve biodiversity, and adopted the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The CBD, considered by some as a landmark in international environmental law due to its all-encompassing nature, puts forward three objectives, namely the conservation of biodiversity, the