
THE ARMIES OF EAST ASIA

**China,
Taiwan,
Japan &
the Koreas**

Dennis Van Vranken Hickey

HICKEY

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To Dad, Mom, and Papa

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—Dennis Van Vranken Hickey

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Introduction

In recent decades, many of the countries of East Asia have transformed themselves from backward, agrarian societies into major economic powers. In fact, the region's economic growth has been astonishing. For example, China now enjoys one of the fastest growing economies in the world and Japan has the world's second-largest economy. Most East Asian nations appear to have recovered from the financial crisis that rocked the region several years ago.

In addition to this remarkable drive toward development, East Asia is experiencing profound political change. Taiwan and South Korea have managed to transform themselves from authoritarian states into full-fledged democracies. In both countries, opposition candidates have been elected to the presidency. Even China now appears to be experimenting with political reforms in the countryside. Perhaps equally surprising, the leaders of South Korea and North Korea held a remarkable summit in June 2000. This meeting has rekindled hopes for a peaceful settlement of the thorny Korean reunification issue.

Today, the Western Pacific is more peaceful, stable, and prosperous than at any time in its history. At the same time, however, defense spending is on the rise. According to some estimates, the region's defense expenditures are poised to overtake those of the Middle East.

This study seeks to shed light on the military buildup in East Asia. Chapter 1 provides readers with a broad discussion of the U.S. ties to the Western Pacific and examines U.S. security policy toward the region. The chapter also provides a general overview of several "flash-points" that could lead to armed conflict in East Asia. Despite the changes in inter-Korean relations, the most serious threat to peace and stability remains the Korean Peninsula. However, tensions over the so-called Taiwan question have escalated markedly in recent years. Another challenge to regional security may be found in the South China

Sea. China is asserting its claims of sovereignty over the region by improving existing facilities in the area and constructing new ones.

The next five chapters provide an in-depth analysis of the armed forces of Japan, China, Taiwan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Each chapter begins with an examination of a state's basic defense policy. Strategies, tactics, and societal roles are explored.¹ A discussion of each military's structure, composition, and organization follows. An emphasis is placed upon the efforts by these governments to modernize their respective land, sea, and air forces and take advantage of the so-called revolution in military affairs. Finally, each chapter concludes with an examination of the major security issues confronting a state. Problems relating to trade, proliferation, ballistic missile defense, territorial disputes, sovereignty, and a host of other issues are analyzed.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, discusses some of the common trends and characteristics shared by the militaries examined in preceding chapters. The author suggests that while some regional developments appear encouraging, the potential for conflict remains very real. In fact, the steady accretion of military power in East Asia represents in and of itself a significant challenge to regional—perhaps even global—peace and stability. Recommendations for U.S. policymakers follow. These range from a call for Washington to convene a series of high-profile arms reduction conferences to a strong recommendation that the United States continue to seek to forge a constructive and stable relationship with China.

It is fair to say that the military capabilities of the armies in East Asia are growing significantly. This represents a challenge for both academics and practitioners interested in the fields of comparative security studies, East Asian politics, and U.S. foreign policy. It is the author's hope that this modest study may provide them with a better understanding and appreciation of these trends and thereby help to promote peace and stability in the Western Pacific.

Notes

1. Like many other terms and concepts employed in international relations, "strategy" is a word that is subject to multiple interpretations. For the purpose of this study, a broad definition seems appropriate. Military strategy may be defined as "the employment of armed forces to achieve military and

political objectives." See Samuel B. Gardiner, "Fundamental Strategic Concepts, Strategists and Their Ideas on War," in George Edward Thibault, ed., *The Art and Practice of Military Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1984), p. 44.

