



BOOK REVIEW

Book Review of “GeoPolitics and the Media in Asia and the Pacific: Pulling in Different Directions”

**Media Narratives and Geopolitical Concerns:
A Saga of the Asia-Pacific Region**

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Kalinga Seneviratne’s latest book “GeoPolitics and the Media in Asia and the South Pacific: Pulling in Different Directions” published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing (UK) is a timely publication that sheds light on the role of the media in matters of geopolitical diplomacy, particularly, in the Asian and the Pacific region. By taking a critical view of the manner in which the global mass media and the social media have been instrumental in fermenting geopolitical conflict between and among Asian and the South Pacific countries, the book offers a counter perspective on the growing responsibility of media platforms in the Asian and the Pacific countries to explore and foster mindful narratives that may contribute to curbing the tendencies of geopolitical conflicts rather than igniting and intensifying them.

The author begins by observing that the West’s argument based on protecting a “rules-based order” boils down to the attitude of a lack of respect for other points of view and inability to understand these points of view on an equal basis. Centering around this them, the book takes a critical view of how “outsiders” – Americans tagged along by the Japanese and Australian media – are creating and encouraging conflict in the Asia-Pacific region by projecting a few countries as threats to the others by invoking the narratives of “debt traps” and “rules-based order” in a selective and biased manner.

The book examines the issues of geopolitics and “security” through multiple lenses, these being, intercultural communication, ideological supremacy mindset, and the adversarial culture fostered by the Western media. In doing so, there is very little discussion on communication theories. Instead, the author relies primarily on content analysis and observations to establish his argument. The only theories that the author deliberates on (in the First Chapter) and intercultural communication and ideological supremacy mindset theory which are necessary to understand the context of many of the content analysis presented in the chapters that follow.

In the Second Chapter, the author takes a historical approach, which he feels is important for young Asians to know. The chapter emphasizes that the ancient silk routes represent the oldest manifestation of globalization and highlights the tranquil character of transactions involving both goods and culture. It also poses the

question as to what lessons of contemporary relevance may be derived from that experience to mitigate the current-day geopolitical tensions. It then shifts to the ongoing discourse over the debt trap narrative in the Asia-Pacific region which the author feels owes its origins to the “Bretton Woods Institutions” who has designed it after the end of the Second World War for guiding and controlling the global economy.

In the Third Chapter, the author discusses the Western mantra of protecting rules-based order, and questions the nature and validity of these rules— giving examples of Japan’s Fukushima nuclear contaminated water dumped into the Pacific Ocean, US’s non-recognition of the UN Law of the Sea Convention and the “derisking” strategy of G7. The chapter highlights the pressing need to address the role of the military-industrial complex that drives today’s geo-political battles and militarization. In the Fourth Chapter, China’s concept of a ‘Community of Common Destiny’ is discussed through the framework of China’s promise and America’s concerns. The chapter examine how China has embarked on a campaign to redefine human rights and democracy with 4 global development and security initiatives, while what the US and its allies are proposing are very vague.

In the Fifth Chapter, the author looks at some disturbing developments in the Indian Ocean region with foreign – old colonial powers – trying to ferment conflict in the region, while India’s muscular diplomacy in the region also draws some critical discussion. Chapter Six is devoted exclusively to Sri Lanka, where the author was born and raised. The heading of the chapter ‘curse of being the pearl in the Indian Ocean’ reflects the thrust of the chapter. It has a lengthy discussion on the ‘fake news’ that fueled the idea of a Chinese debt trap exploding in Sri Lanka in 2022. Chapter Seven goes away from the oceans to the mountain ranges of the Himalayas. The potential for conflict on the border between India and China in the Himalayan mountain range is also discussed at length in this chapter, warning of “outsiders” (non-Asians) helping to create conflict in the post-Dalai Lama period.

Chapter Eight focuses on Southeast Asia questioning the US role in fermenting conflict in the South China Sea, while critically analyzing China’s claims to much of the maritime territory there. Chapter Nine exclusively focuses on the Philippines because at the time of writing tensions were increasing in the region with Philippines’ President Marcos’s tilt towards the US, and the latter seemingly using the Philippines to trigger conflict with China. Chapters Ten and Eleven focus on the South Pacific. Drawing experiences from his stay at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji in 2022 and 2023 when a ferocious geo-political battle brewed up with China on one side and the US tagged by Australia on the other side, the author presents a critical analysis of this disturbing development mainly from a Pacific perspective. Accordingly, these chapters deliberate on a wide range of issues, from impact of climate change on communities to the “outside” media, creating a geo-political battle field in the Pacific. The author is particularly critical of the Australian media’s reporting of China’s engagement with the South Pacific and describes it as ‘China-bashing smear journalism’. The concluding chapter (Chapter Twelve) examines the weaponization of media in geopolitical conflicts, emphasizing the necessity to comprehend the military-industrial complex’s influence on media narratives and the imperative for Asian and Pacific media to cultivate autonomous narratives about pertinent topics.

While a bit more discussion about the BRICS alliance which is expected to play an important role in geo-political diplomacy of the Asian and the region in the near future would have certainly widened the scope and relevance of this book further, nonetheless, the book qualifies as a good resource for students of communication studies and international relations, particularly from the Asia-Pacific region, who are interested in understanding the various approaches and intricacies of geo-political diplomacy which is likely to be the focal point of international relations and peace concerns in the new millennium across the world as a whole.

Book Details

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