
Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and International Relations in East Asia. Edited By Etel Solingen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

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Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and International Relations in East Asia. Edited By Etel Solingen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1-108-83356-1. Maps. Photographs. Glossary. Notes. Sources cited. Index. Pp.vi, 300. \$34.99.

Review by Dennis L.C. Weng Ph.D.

Thirteen prominent political scientists contribute to *Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and International Relations in East Asia*. The edited volume represents their attempt to assess what has changed in East Asia and Asia-Pacific through a unique perspective on global supply chains (GSCs) in international relations. As various forms of economic exchange have expanded rapidly in Asia, and the regional relations have been at peace for the last few decades, this region enjoyed stabilization and gradually occupied a crucial position in GSCs. While many focus the study of GSCs on the processes that embraces the procurement of goods, production and assembly of products, and distribution to final delivery to the end customer, few studies focus on how GSCs changed how the world is connected.

What readers have in this book is an exquisite demonstration of why GSCs increased in Asia and how GSCs influence the region. Unlike many existing political economy studies focusing on trade relations across countries, this book suggests that GSC integration results from concrete policies and the decisions made by different countries for political survival. The book's main idea is to explain what drives the evolution of GSCs, and the strategies adopted by various public and private actors in Asia to cope with challenges, particularly amid the escalated US-China competition and the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Part I of this book starts with the geopolitical tension between the US and China. "Global Value Chains and the US-China Trade War" (Chapter 2) by Yuqing Xing argues that Chinese firms have benefited from the expansion of GSCs in the past few decades, but their impressive performance led to concerns from the US as American presidential administrations noticed the persistently large US trade deficits with China.

“The US-China Trade War: Implications for Japan’s Global Value Chains” (Chapter 3) by Hongyoung Zhang discusses the impact of the US-China trade war on Japan’s GSCs operating in China and other places in Asia. As most of the high-tech parts and components for today’s advanced electronic products are highly differentiated and even firm-specific in design, the contributing authors claim that disruption in GSCs may have an enormous impact on Japan and the world economy. “Constructing a Chinese AI Global Supply Chain in the Shadow of ‘Great Power Competition’” (Chapter 4) and “Competition and Collaboration among East Asian Firms in the Smartphone Supply Chains” (Chapter 5) by Victor Shih and Momoko Kawakami respectively use two specific sectoral GSCs, artificial intelligence (AI) and smartphone, with particular attention to the leading firms in East Asia as examples to illustrate how the technological competition between the US and China changed the evolution of the GSCs from driven by commercial interests to restricted by the government policies.

The last two chapters of the first part “Hidden Economic Costs of Geopolitical Disputes for Supply Chains in East Asia,” and “Global Supply Chains and Great Power Competition in Africa” on the ground focus on the effect of political disputes and competitions on GSCs in Asia and Africa. The findings show the hidden costs of geopolitical conflicts affecting firms and governments in making decisions. Overall, the first part of this book explains the rapid and successful development of GSCs in Asia, but it also implies that the Chinese government shifted to an inward-oriented strategy to cope with the US-China trade war.

Part II addresses the concerns about domestic drivers that may affect GSCs in Asia. In “Are Global Supply Chains Vital to China’s Leaders” (Chapter 8), Demir and Solingen elaborate on how China’s outward-oriented political economy model successfully took advantage of the purpose and receptivity to GSCs to lay the foundation that strengthens China’s capability to transform. Chapter 9 “Firms Fight Back” by Lee and Osgood examines different trade competition models adopted by private sectors and details the possible responses of multinational firms to the US-China trade war.

Chapter 10 “Understanding and Contesting Global Supply Chains in an Era of Inequality” by Erin Lockwood focuses on the relationship between

domestic politics in the US and the discourse on international trade. Looking at the debate over the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) during the 2016 presidential election, this chapter suggests that the foreign policy decisions on GSCs are associated with the domestic consequences perceived at home. Chapter 11 “Why Escalate? Cognitive Theory and Global Supply Chains in Northeast Asia” by Phoebe W. Moon uses Northeast Asian countries as cases to examine each country’s strategic position, which possesses different roles within the GSCs’ value-added hierarchy. The finding demonstrates that states with higher value-added positions in a specific industry would be more risk averse as the lower value-added replacement may be easier to find. Chapter 12 “The Role of Chinese Workers in Supply Chain Campaigns” by Marissa Brookes analyzes China’s strategic moves within the GSCs to improve the national position. While the finding suggests that the actual improvement is still a long shot, some potential implications of reduced GSCs’ reliance on China may have some influence in the future.

Finally, the last chapter of this book “On Covid-19, Global Supply Chains, and Geopolitics” by Etel Solingen is a postscript crafted after the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide outbreak, in which the future role of GSCs was hugely uncertain. This chapter concludes the collective work with preliminary suggestions for future research in this crucial area of international relations.

This book provides a timely evaluation of the GSCs in today’s geopolitical competition. By delineating the evolution of GSCs in Asia over the last several decades and providing a concrete theoretical explanation of the structure of GSCs, this book helps advance our understanding of the relationship between geopolitical tensions and international economic exchanges. While the book attempts to stretch out the reciprocal interactions between geopolitics and international trade relations, each country’s traditional national security concerns may hinder the GSC integration and potentially lead to more dangerous confrontation has received less attention. Notably, the China-Taiwan dispute may significantly impact future GSCs as the tension continues escalating alongside US-China competition. The book could have investigated this topic in more detail. Given the book’s emphasis on the effect of geopolitics on the GSCs structure, the traditional security disputes in Asia should be better integrated into the GSCs in the international relations framework.

While there is always room for any book to improve, this book broadly covered all the essential information regarding the GSCs in Asia, and readers seeking a good reference in the area of GSCs will find it extremely useful. For someone who aims to study GSCs and their interactions with geopolitics in Asia, this book is highly recommended as it will provide an excellent starting point.