

Biermeier, Jens D.

**Article — Digitized Version**

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Intereconomics

*Suggested Citation:* Biermeier, Jens D. (1985) : America's shifting emphasis to the Pacific, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 20, Iss. 5, pp. 245-250, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02926972>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/139993>

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## America's Shifting Emphasis to the Pacific

by Jens D. Biermeier, Los Angeles\*

**East Asian nations, which not long ago were counted among the more backward, are emerging as dramatically expanding markets as well as tough competitors for the United States. Predictions are that the Pacific-rim economy will expand twice as fast as the rest of the world. Professor Jens Biermeier shows that there has been a shift in the trading pattern of the United States away from Europe towards Asia as well as a shift of US political and strategic interests from the Atlantic to the Pacific in recent years.**

Prior to World War I, Western civilization was Europe-centered and Europe-dominated. The Pacific was merely an image of physical geography whose socioeconomic significance was dwarfed by the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Despite its immense size, the Pacific Basin, which includes an area stretching from Japan through Hong Kong to Indochina, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, to and across Australia, through New Zealand to the West Coast of the United States and Canada, remained insignificant in world affairs. Military strategy, diplomatic activity, and business enterprise all focused on Europe and North America and thus made the North Atlantic the center of international activities.

There are two major reasons for the previously insignificant amount of trade activity between Western and East Asian nations. First, capital movement to the Pacific Basin was restricted, exemplifying the fundamental economic theory that trade and investment flow largely among advanced industrial countries, rather than between poor and rich ones. Second, in the past, social and cultural differences had severely hindered any major economic expansion in the Asian nations. Long-established traditional beliefs were partly responsible for the Asian resistance to modernization. This lack of industrialization prevented facilitation of further Eastern-Western trade.

An important difference between America's eastward and westward orientations is that it has powerful organic connections on the European side. The United States began as a colony of European civilization. It has long

had a unique culture and distinctive attributes that sharply distinguish it from its European source; but it is bound to Europe by cultural connections and identifications, personal and family ties, intellectual affinities, and shared experiences. There have always been strong economic incentives for the United States to pursue close cooperation with the European Community due to the fact that most of its overseas investments have been concentrated in Western Europe.

### Emergence of the Asian Pacific Region

After World War II, US resources were principally directed toward European reconstruction and development. It was at this same time that Japan lay helpless, its people demoralized. Industry was at a standstill and prospects were bleak and uninviting. In 1945, Japan's future looked dismal; two major cities were destroyed, industrial establishments were devastated, and raw materials were scarce.

Japan, however, possessed an important resource, a reservoir of economic skills. Once economic order was restored, investment capital was highly productive because skilled workers were readily available. Also beneficial to Japan was the US-Japan Treaty, which stipulated that the United States defend Japan against aggression and protect her from external interference in internal affairs. As a result, Japan spent only minimal capital on military defense; and, therefore, was able to channel practically all of its resources toward rebuilding and enlarging the country's economic base.

The development of new trade patterns has accelerated the economic growth of the region as a

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\*California State University.

whole and, as such, has considerably strengthened the stability of a number of countries in the Pacific area.<sup>1</sup> The rapid rise in population led to problems of unemployment. In order to control the unemployment, Southeast Asian leaders realized the need for rapid progress in both agricultural production and industrialization. The importance of increasing trade opportunities became obvious. The major stimulus for the change came from the concentrated efforts of the less developed countries themselves: to gain trade advantages in order to foster industrial development.

East Asian nations, which not long ago were counted among the more backward, are emerging as dramatically expanding markets as well as tough competitors for the United States. During the last twenty years, Western Europe's share of world output has declined from around 30 % to less than 25 %. At the same time, Japan's share has jumped from 3.4 % to 10.5 %, and the share of the newly industrializing countries in Asia has doubled from 5 % to 10 %.

The economic emergence of the Asian region was led by Japan's spectacular expansion "wave" during the 1960s. Now that Japan has established itself as a strong economic force in global terms, many of its neighbors are following its lead. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – is the region expanding more rapidly than any other developing area and is expanding twice as fast as the industrialized countries. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore,

Malaysia and Indonesia have emerged as mini-Japans, each with steady growth rates, rising affluence and modern industries competing in world markets.

Economic interdependence among countries in the Pacific has also increased quite rapidly. In the 1970s the economies of the Pacific Basin became so deeply interrelated that those links could not be overlooked. Fifty-two percent of the ASEAN countries' exports and fifty-four percent of their imports were intra-regional, compared with corresponding figures for intra-EC trade, which stood at fifty-two percent for exports and forty-seven percent for imports in 1980.<sup>2</sup>

The domestic income potential as markets, and their export supply capability, made the East Asian countries of the Pacific Basin commercially the most dynamic in the world. By providing the primary forces of leadership and protection, the United States significantly aided the development of this area.<sup>3</sup>

### Change in Trade Patterns

In 1950 the United States traded with Western Europe at a volume of \$ 4.4 billion. Trade with Asia-Pacific during the same period was \$ 3.1 billion, representing a \$ 1.3 billion gap in the Europeans' favor. By 1970 trade volume across the Atlantic was \$ 21 billion, \$ 6.5 billion in excess of the Pacific trade of \$ 14.5 billion. Since 1978, US trade has expanded on a spectacular scale – by more than 75 percent – with countries that ring the far Pacific.

The crucial historical shift in US trading patterns from Europe to Asia occurred in 1980. In that year total trade turnover (exports plus imports) between the United States and the East Asian countries was \$ 2 billion greater than trade between the United States and Western Europe. By 1983, there was a trade difference

<sup>1</sup> L. B. Krause: Economic Interaction in the Pacific Basin, Washington D. C., 1980.

<sup>2</sup> See W. L. Lütgenhorst: Pacific Basin Interdependencies – A case for Large-Scale Economic Cooperation?, in: INTERECONOMICS, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1983, p. 28 ff.

<sup>3</sup> L. B. Krause: U. S. Economic Policy toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Washington D. C., 1982.

## WELTKONJUNKTUR DIENST

Annual subscription rate  
DM 80,-  
ISSN 0342-6335

This quarterly report – compiled by the Department on Business Cycles and Statistics of the Hamburg Institute for International Economics – analyses and forecasts the economic development of the most important Western industrial nations and of the international raw materials markets.

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## REPORT

**Table 1**  
**Key Economic Indicators**

	Population <sup>1</sup>	Population Growth <sup>2</sup>	GDP per capita	GDP Growth <sup>2</sup>	Growth of Investment <sup>3</sup>	Growth <sup>2</sup> of Exports	Growth <sup>2</sup> of Imports
Hong Kong	5.2	2.4	5,100	9.9	14.1	9.7	12.1
Indonesia	149.5	2.3	530	7.8	14.0	6.5	11.9
Japan	117.6	1.1	10,080	4.5	3.1	9.0	3.9
Korea	38.9	1.7	1,700	9.1	12.2	22.0	10.9
Malaysia	14.2	2.5	1,840	7.8	10.4	6.8	7.8
Philippines	49.6	2.7	790	6.2	10.1	7.7	2.6
Singapore	2.4	1.5	5,240	8.5	7.2	12.0	9.9
Taiwan	17.9	2.0	2,567	9.7	8.2	9.3	9.1
Thailand	48.0	2.5	770	7.2	7.5	11.8	4.9
China	991.3	1.5	300	5.0	6.0	—	—
USA	229.8	1.0	12,820	2.9	1.9	6.5	4.4
EC	270.2	0.3	8,819	2.8	0.8	6.2	4.9

<sup>1</sup> Millions, mid-81. <sup>2</sup> Average annual growth 1970-1981. <sup>3</sup> Gross domestic fixed capital formation: average annual growth 1970-81.  
Source: World Bank: World Development Report 1983.

of \$ 28.9 billion in favor of the East Asian countries, which means a rise of 24 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The trade component most responsible for this pattern change has been US imports from Pacific Asia which have tripled from 1975 to 1983. Imports from this region continued to grow and contribute a large component of the United States' 1984 trade deficit of about \$ 130 billion. Total imports from three countries, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan in 1983 exceeded the value of all imports from Western Europe. Beside Canada, Japan is the second most important trading partner of the United States with over \$ 62 billion traded in 1983.

South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore accounted for another \$ 44 billion in trade with the USA. In 1984 Japan and South Korea ranked in the top ten US export markets; and Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong ranked in the top ten import countries.

East Asia has replaced Western Europe as the number one foreign market for American agricultural exports. It now accounts for nearly one third of total sales abroad of US farm products. Similarly, American investment in the Pacific-rim nations is rising much faster than in any other region. From 1979 to 1984, it jumped by nearly 65 percent, against a global rise of only 39 percent.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of 1984, US direct investment in these countries accounted for more than \$ 30 billion.

The stressing of the importance and the enormous future potential of the Pacific Rim is based on many

factors but most of all on the dramatic economic growth in the Pacific region in recent years. During the period 1970 to 1981 the EC nations showed a GDP-weighted growth rate of only 2.8 percent. For the market-economy Asian nations of the Pacific Basin listed in Table 1, the average GDP-weighted growth was 5.4 percent. It should be noted, however, that this figure is significantly lowered by Japan's low growth of 4.5 percent average.

Over the past decade the average compounded growth rate of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore – collectively known as the “gang of four” or “the four tigers” – has been 8.2 percent, roughly three times that of the nations of the European Community. Similar gains have been registered by Indonesia and Malaysia.

As can be seen from Table 2, the “exports as an engine of growth” model has vastly different impacts on the various economies. Some countries such as

**Table 2**  
**Merchandise Exports as a Percent of GDP, 1983**

	Exports \$ US Million	GDP \$ US Million	Exports/GDP Percent
Hong Kong	21,737	27,220	79.9
Indonesia	22,259	84,960	26.2
Japan	152,016	1,129,500	13.5
Korea	21,254	65,750	32.3
Malaysia	12,884	24,770	52.0
Philippines	5,722	38,900	14.7
Singapore	20,967	12,910	162.4
Thailand	6,918	36,810	18.8
China	21,560	264,340	8.2
USA	233,739	2,893,300	8.1
EC	738,246	2,469,570	29.9

Source: World Bank: World Development Report 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration: International Economic Indicators, March 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration: International Direct Investment, August 1984.

## REPORT

**Table 3**  
**Exports 1970-1981**  
(\$ US millions)

	World	USA	EC	Market Economies Developed	Market Economies Developing
1970	312,011	42,590	112,146	224,236	54,944
1973	573,358	70,246	210,339	406,918	109,159
1974	837,894	97,144	274,391	541,660	225,004
1975	872,692	106,157	295,768	577,192	210,855
1976	989,303	113,323	325,718	642,079	255,154
1977	1,124,923	117,926	379,202	727,709	290,468
1978	1,298,121	139,999	458,414	871,987	391,649
1979	1,636,924	173,645	573,382	1,071,791	415,140
1980	1,994,337	212,887	657,251	1,260,634	558,624
1981	1,970,225	225,777	607,743	1,243,283	542,315
Growth (1981/1970)	6.3	5.3	5.4	5.5	9.9

Source: United Nations: Yearbook of International Trade, Vol. 1, Trade by Country, 1982.

**Table 4**  
**USA Export Trade**  
(\$ US billions)

	Market Economies							
	EC	Developed Countries	LDCs	Asia	Japan	Asia Other <sup>1</sup>	Asia C.P. <sup>2</sup>	Latin America
1970	11.1	29.6	12.3	9.8	4.6	3.7	0.4	6.5
1973	16.4	46.9	19.9	17.2	8.2	6.3	1.0	9.8
1974	21.6	62.7	31.0	23.2	10.6	8.5	1.5	16.7
1975	22.4	64.6	37.8	22.1	9.4	9.8	0.5	16.9
1976	24.9	70.4	39.0	22.9	10.0	10.1	0.1	16.8
1977	25.9	73.2	41.7	24.0	10.4	10.6	0.2	17.6
1978	30.6	84.3	50.6	30.3	12.7	13.4	0.8	21.6
1979	39.4	105.1	60.4	41.6	17.3	18.3	1.7	27.7
1980	50.7	124.6	76.3	51.6	20.5	22.6	3.8	37.7
1981	48.0	128.4	83.8	53.8	21.3	22.6	3.6	41.2
Growth	4.3	4.3	6.8	5.5	4.6	6.2	10.3	6.4

<sup>1</sup> Asian Nations who operate under a market economy system other than Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

<sup>2</sup> Centrally planned economies in Asia.

Source: United Nations: Yearbook of International Trade, Vol. 1, Trade by Country, 1982.

Singapore<sup>6</sup> and Hong Kong generate most of their economic well-being from exports while others such as Japan and the Philippines generate relatively little.

Population growth in these Asian countries is clearly ahead of Europe and especially the EC. For many developing nations this is a deterrent to continued growth as rapidly rising population can eradicate much, if not all, of the benefit of economic growth. In the case of these Asian nations it can clearly be seen that their economic growth rates are so far ahead of population growth rates that this is not a source of concern. Despite

this fact, these countries are slowing their population growth rate. This will mean that they will see even greater impact from their economic growth in the future as the smaller increase of population receives ever larger shares of increased economic growth.

The GDP growth rates shown by these Asian countries are especially notable when compared with other developing countries in Latin America and Africa, many of whose rates have been negative in recent years. All of these nations are ahead of the average GDP-weighted growth for the same period of the low-income countries (4.5 percent), the middle-income countries (5.6 percent), the upper-middle income countries (5.6 percent), – in fact, even the high-income oil producers (5.3 percent) and the industrial market economies (3.0 percent).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For those unfamiliar with international trade statistics, it should be explained that Singapore can have exports that are greater than GDP because Singapore imports vast quantities of industrial and consumer inputs that are then processed in Singapore for export. The only part of these enhanced imports that is included in Singapore's GDP is the value added in the processing.

Since exports play such an important part in the economic planning of these nations and have contributed significantly to the growth of their economies it should be noted that even the lowest growth nation (Indonesia) is at least even with and ahead of the USA and the EC respectively. Table 3 shows the trends in world trade. While world exports have increased 6.3 times, US exports have increased less than the economically depressed EC, developed economies as a whole and developing economies as a whole. The vastly higher growth of the developing areas of the world is clear in their growth rate of 9.9 times.

However, while world trade declined slightly for the first time since 1970 to 98.8 percent of the 1980 figure, US trade maintained its rise. This is especially important since in recent years the US has shown greater dependence on exports. Still, this continued growth of US exports in the final year of the table produces a growth figure for the period that is less than the EC, which had a substantial decline (to only 92.5 percent of the 1980 figure).

When examining the growth trends of US trade to the regions indicated in Table 4, some idea of the changing relationships between the US and its trading partners may be seen.

The dollar value of US exports to the EC declined in 1981 for the first time since 1970. Trade to the developed nations as a whole increased by \$ 3.8 billion, while trade to the developing nations increased by \$ 7.4 billion. Trade with the developing market economies of the world over this period increased some 6.8 times. This growth is nearly one and a half times the growth of trade to the EC over the same period.

In the period under examination the trade to the centrally planned economies of Asia increased dramatically. The potential for further increases to this area, which includes the Peoples' Republic of China, is enormous. But just how fast the potential will be reached is difficult to forecast.<sup>8</sup>

Other Asia trade has nearly doubled in just five years and the major impediment to a continuation of this trend seems to be the US economy's strength. This region's trade growth has reached the point where the dollar volume has surpassed US trade with Japan and it is a certainty that it will soon far surpass US trade with Japan as the relative growth rates of their economies is such that their ability to import will far exceed Japan's.

As shown in Table 5, over the period in question, the US has decreased its exports to the EC as a proportion of total exports. Both the EC and all developed nations have declined as recipient nations of America's export trade. The EC has declined 19.1 percent, while developed countries as a whole have declined 18 percent.

The LDCs as a whole have shown an increase in imports from the US of 28.8 percent. They are now substantially ahead of the EC and represent over 65 percent of US trade to the developed areas of the world. Asia as a whole has shown only a moderate increase, but it is necessary to recognize the overwhelming effect that Japan now has on this figure. Since Japan has shown a decline over the period in question, the relatively small increase of the Asian figure should not be given too much emphasis. Other areas of the Pacific Basin that have shown significant increases as a percentage of US trade over the period in question are: Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Latin America – several of whom are major Pacific Basin traders; and a large percentage of the increases have come from Latin American trade.

A further area of interest to Americans must be the degree to which the US is accepting imports from the rest of the world, and from which areas in particular. Table 6 shows these relationships.

Once again it can be seen that the traditional trading partners of the US are falling behind the newer trading partners. Developing nations are far ahead of the EC and represent over 65 percent of developed nations' trade. Asia, as a whole, is substantially ahead of the developed nations in growth rate, and Latin America is substantially ahead of Asia.

Increasingly the makeup of this trade to the US is in manufactures, especially manufactures that come to the eye of the American consumer.

### Political Ramifications

With the emergence of the far Pacific region as America's dominant trading partner, the stability and security of the area are taking on greatly increased importance. Traditionally, where US trade has gone, so too has gone the flag – in terms of US strategic commitments. The United States already is heavily involved in the defense of friendly nations on the Pacific Rim.

Of Washington's eight mutual-security treaties worldwide, no fewer than five are with nations in that region: Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand

<sup>7</sup> Cf. World Bank: World Development Report, New York 1983.

<sup>8</sup> R. Dennis, S. Munson: Trading with China. A boon for some, a disappointment for many, in: Management Review, May 1983, pp. 13-20.

**Table 5**  
**US Exports**

As a Percent of US Exports to World<sup>1</sup>

	EC	Developed Countries	LDCs	Asia	Japan	Asia Other <sup>2</sup>	Asia C.P. <sup>3</sup>	Latin America
1970	26.2	69.5	28.8	23.0	10.8	8.6	0.8	15.2
1973	23.3	66.8	28.3	24.4	11.6	8.9	1.4	14.0
1974	22.2	64.5	31.9	23.9	10.9	8.7	1.5	16.1
1975	21.1	60.9	35.6	20.8	8.9	9.3	0.5	16.0
1976	22.0	62.1	34.4	20.2	8.8	8.9	0.1	14.8
1977	21.9	62.1	35.3	20.4	8.8	9.0	0.2	15.0
1978	21.8	60.2	36.1	21.6	9.0	9.5	0.6	15.4
1979	22.7	60.5	34.8	24.0	10.0	10.5	1.0	16.0
1980	23.8	58.5	35.9	24.3	9.6	10.6	1.8	17.7
1981	21.2	57.0	37.1	23.8	9.4	10.0	1.6	18.2

<sup>1</sup> Average for 1970-1981.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1, Table 4.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Table 4.

Source: United Nations: Yearbook of International Trade, Vol. 1, Trade by Country, 1982.

**Table 6**  
**Exports to USA**  
(\$ US billions)

	EC	Developed Countries	LDCs	Asia	Japan	Asia Other <sup>1</sup>	Asia C.P. <sup>2</sup>	Latin America
1970	9.2	28.7	10.1	10.2	6.0	3.3	0.0	5.7
1973	15.7	47.9	20.3	18.3	9.6	7.0	0.1	9.7
1974	18.9	59.8	39.2	24.8	12.9	10.2	0.1	19.3
1975	16.3	55.0	38.0	22.7	11.3	9.8	0.2	17.2
1976	18.1	66.8	50.0	32.2	15.9	14.5	0.2	19.4
1977	23.4	80.0	64.7	39.7	20.0	17.8	0.2	21.8
1978	29.6	96.5	70.1	49.3	25.1	21.4	0.3	23.6
1979	34.4	111.0	92.3	54.9	26.6	24.5	0.6	29.5
1980	36.8	121.7	116.7	65.7	31.7	29.8	1.1	37.0
1981	42.0	140.3	112.6	76.3	38.9	33.0	1.9	58.6
Growth	4.6	4.9	11.1	7.5	6.5	9.9	1870	10.3

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 1, Table 4.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 2, Table 4.

Source: United Nations: Yearbook of International Trade, Vol. 1, Trade by Country, 1982.

and the ANZUS-Pact states of Australia and New Zealand. America also has an implicit commitment to the defense of Taiwan despite renunciation of a formal treaty at the time full diplomatic relations were established with China. The 1985 foreign assistance request of the US Department of State for East Asia and the Pacific totals approximately \$ 793 million and would be an increase of some 13.1 percent over the 1984 allocations of just over \$ 701 million.<sup>9</sup>

In the non-defense field there is still no Pacific Community comparable to the codified system of treaties as it exists for the European Community. However a Pacific Cooperation is already a constitutive

element of the region, and numerous conferences, seminars and institutions have meanwhile presented their research reports and action plans.

The first steps are being taken to develop a regional grouping to promote cooperation and minimize the dangers of friction among nations of the Pacific Basin. Besides the United States, the group consists of the six members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei, as well as Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Only China is missing. At this stage, analysts stress the symbolic rather than the practical importance of US participation in this loose grouping.<sup>10</sup>

But the American engagement can be regarded as one further sign that Washington is intent on meeting the challenge of the new frontier opening up in the far Pacific. Substantial changes have occurred in the relationships between the United States and nations of the Pacific Basin versus its traditional allies in Europe. Japan<sup>11</sup> soon may be forced into greater trade with the Pacific Basin countries and greater interest in integration, as the US and the EC may restrict her exports as threats to their own economic growth and trade balance.

There are also discussions of Asian and Latin American nations merging their economic interests to form a Third World Front to the Super Powers of Europe, Japan and the US. Whatever the result, it is clear that, integrated or not, the Pacific Basin will be the source of great economic and strategic growth in the future.

Euro-pessimism has been spreading ever since the mid-1970s in sharp contrast to the buoyant mood in the United States, Japan and Pacific-rim countries. Many investors and exporters see Europe – with its less dynamic, bureaucratic, welfare societies – falling further behind in technology and industrial innovation. With regard to economic, strategic and political commitments, America's Atlantic ties may have lost the character of something to be taken for granted in Western Europe.

<sup>10</sup> In a statement before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 22, 1984, P. D. Wolfowitz, US Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, is skeptical as to whether the US ever wants to get to the point of promoting some form of Pacific Community along the lines of the EC. "I think we are a long way from the time when something highly organized like the EC is feasible or desirable. That approach may have lowered trade barriers among the 10 member countries in Europe but it has not been without its problems for trade relationships between Europe and the rest of the world. I don't think we want to see that spread."

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed summary of the specific geopolitical conditions for Japan, see J. Glauitz: Japanese Foreign and Security Policy, in: Außenpolitik, German Foreign Affairs Review, Vol. 35, No. 2/84, pp. 173 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 84, No. 2086, May 1984, pp. 52 ff.