

## Softcover: Singapore

The great divide:  
Can Asia and the  
US work together?

*With past mistakes now compounded by the economic crisis, America's role in the region is due for a makeover*

BY J. MICHAEL COLE  
STAFF REPORTER

The global economic crisis, added to missteps by the administration of former president George W. Bush, widened the space between the US and Asia in a process that could have far-reaching implications economically and politically, Simon Tay argues in a timely new book.

While the re-emergence of China as a regional power, and the attendant US malaise, figure prominently in *Asia Alone*, the seeds of the growing divide between Washington and Asia, Tay tells us, were actually sown during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998. What Tay refers to as the "Asian surrender" is epitomized by then-IMF president Michel Camdessus "standing imperiously, arms folded," while Indonesian president Suharto signed harsh IMF prescriptions to save his country's economy. At the APEC summit in Kuala Lumpur the following year, then-vice president Al Gore "surprised" his audience during a dinner for business leaders by calling for greater democracy in Asia rather than delivering the expected pro-business slogans.

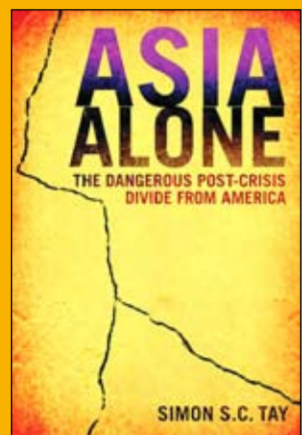
What Camdessus and Gore managed to accomplish, the author claims, is to alienate a community of nations that was slowly beginning to come together, an insult that in the following decade would be exacerbated by Bush's "arrogance" and poor showing on human rights and US exceptionalism during the financial crisis, where it avoided the very prescriptions imposed by the Washington-based IMF in 1997-1998. As regional organizations like APEC and ASEAN came into being, a sense that Asia, with the Chinese powerhouse at its center, could act more independently — or beyond that, isolate itself from the rest of the world, in a feat of self-sufficiency — has slowly emerged. Spurred by nationalism (mostly in China), this development was compounded by the global economic crisis, which gave rise to finger pointing, with the US more often than not at the receiving end.

Tay warns us that if that trend were to continue, the US could find itself excluded from a region that is increasingly seen as both the global engine for growth and a source of conflict. Such an outcome, he argues, is undesirable, as the US remains the greatest guarantor of the stability and security that contributed to Asia's rise in the first place. Furthermore, as ASEAN has yet to prove its mettle as an effective guarantor in terms of conflict resolution and a forum for problem solving, and with a power imbalance within the region probably unseen elsewhere, no single country, let alone multilateral body, has the capacity to fill the vacuum that would be created by a US retreat. Given lingering historical tensions, such as those between Japan and China, or India and China, the region would face great uncertainty, if not instability, if the pacifying effect of US engagement were suddenly to disappear. As such, replacing one hegemon with another — in other words, substituting the US for China — is not an option for the foreseeable future.

This does not mean, however, that the key to success in Asia lies in a return to the past. In fact, Tay states, the global financial downturn, which led to a relative decline in power for the US vis-a-vis Asia, has permanently altered the global architecture, and there is no going back to the status quo ante. The principal implication of this transformation is that the US will have to adopt a more multilateral approach to Asia, one in which it learns how to cooperate rather than dictate — a role that could take Washington years to become accustomed to, though Tay already gives the Obama administration good marks in that regard.

Rather than step back and lick its wounds, the US must be willing to engage Asia at many levels and depart from the narrowly focused relationship that characterized the Bush era, where Washington's Asia policy was almost exclusively centered on the "war on terrorism." Only a self-confident US, one that is strong on the home front and that

## PUBLICATION NOTES



ASIA ALONE: THE DANGEROUS  
POST-CRISIS DIVIDE FROM AMERICA  
BY SIMON S.C. TAY  
206 PAGES  
JOHN WILEY & SONS

has regained faith in its economic power, will be able to accomplish this task, Tay argues. A better understanding of Asian customs, mores, culture and history among Americans will also be necessary to allow policymakers to sell such a policy of engagement to the public, which otherwise could adopt a xenophobic — or rather *sino*-phobic — view that could affect the political leaders who are voted into office.

Similarly, fears of China's rise will only be assuaged if Beijing restrains nationalistic fervor among its people and engages the US in a constructive manner on such issues as global warming, nuclear non-proliferation, regional security and economic stability. There is no question that a "go-it-alone" attitude on China's part, along with regional economies that could choose to bandwagon on Beijing's rise and gang up against the US, would be detrimental to addressing many of the region's problems, old and emerging. On economics alone, China stands to lose tremendously if its policies feed into US fears and result in protectionist policies in Washington. Despite its strong economic showing, the fact remains that China will for many years continue to be an export-driven economy whose domestic consumption is insufficient to spur economic growth.

In sum, the prescriptions outlined in the book apply as much to the US as they do to China, and Singapore-based Tay is well positioned to make them.

The picture that emerges from *Asia Alone* is one where despite its unprecedented gravitas, Asia remains a loosely knit collection of disparate states whose future direction will likely be contingent on how the US and the major regional players, namely China, Japan and India, address the challenge of a reordered context in the wake of the global financial crisis. Greater intra-regional cooperation, where all the players are treated as equals rather than being lorded over by a regional hegemon, and continued, albeit more restrained, engagement by the US, could be what's required to secure the future of a region that remains rife with deep historical scars, tremendous developmental inequality, and uncertainty.

Tay's book says little about the Taiwan question — a blind spot, given the central role the country plays in Sino-US relations — and was written before the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) between Taiwan and China was signed. That said, it provides a useful overview of the complexities arising from Asia's emergence and manages to do so in a format that, despite its focus on economics, is both engaging and informative.

One glaring historical mistake is a reference to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden living and studying in the US "for many years" before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Despite Tay's claim, bin Laden is only known to have visited the US for two weeks in 1979, with his wife, while seeking medical treatment for one of their sons.



LADY MACBETH OF  
MTSENSK  
Shostakovich  
Maggio Musicale Fiorentino  
ARTHAUS 101387

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
STAFF REPORTER

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* is fast becoming appreciated as one of the great 20th century operas. "Lady Macbeth" is shorthand for a woman killer (even though Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare never actually kills anyone). This story of a frustrated wife who experiences cruel male oppression and rape, and takes her revenge via a lover and some poison, was a major success in Moscow until Stalin attended a performance, hidden behind a curtain, and, his puritanism scandalized and possibly also fearing murderous plots against himself, had it closed down the following morning.

This pair of DVDs from Florence, Italy, issued last year, makes a strong showing. The general atmosphere of the opera comprises boredom, both sexual and in the workplace, leading to periodic outbursts of brutality and sadism. The set is entirely of unpolished wood and must have cost a great deal to build. It therefore has to suffice for the musically rich outdoor scene in the prison camp which ends the opera as well, with paper snow effective enough in the circumstances.

There has been some damning by faint praise of this set of DVDs on the Internet, but I found it consistently enjoyable. Jeanne-Michele Charbonnet is outstanding as Katerina, and Sergej Kunaev convincingly undeterred as Sergei. James Conlon conducts the orchestra and chorus of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

Another version of this opera, with Nadine Secunde and Christopher Ventris, was reviewed in the *Taipei Times* on Jan. 13, 2005 (EMI 5 99730 9). It had stronger contrasts, with more farce, than this Italian production, and seemed at the time hard to better. This new version has its own distinctive character nonetheless.

Video Artists International (VAI) in the US has a justified reputation for unearthing historic recordings and then presenting them in DVD format with cleaned-up sound and new subtitles. They have just released a *Nozze di Figaro* from the Salzburg Festival of 1963, but this is if anything overshadowed by an even older item in their catalogue.

Figaro first though. Why, with so very many versions of this opera available on DVD, should anyone want one in black-and-white with mono sound? The answer is that it preserves the performances of artists much praised in their day. This one has Geraint Evans as Figaro, Evelyn Lear as Cherubino, Hilde Guden as the Countess, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as the Count and Graziella Sciutti as Susanna. Lorin Maazel conducts the Vienna Philharmonic.

For some reason, though, I found this DVD lackluster. It may have been the fact that it was a clumsily

filmed staged version that was the problem. But even musically it often sounded harsh and unlovely.

This DVD, therefore, is of only historic interest. It contains none of that Mozartian magic necessary for any real recommendation. That kind of magic, and much more, can be found on the superb film with Herman Prey, Mirella Freni, Kiri Ti Kanawa and (again) Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (DGM 073 4034), reviewed in the *Taipei Times* on Aug. 4, 2005.

The VAI item I was most impressed by recently was a performance of *Turandot* with the great Franco Corelli in the role of Calaf. It's taken from an Italian telecast in 1958, and once again is in black-and-white with mono sound. But I found it one of the most absorbing versions of this opera I've ever watched. There's something muted about it — no over-the-top histrionics for *Nessun Dorma*, for instance — and Corelli reveals himself not as just a big voice but as a genuine and sensitive artist. This is backed up by a stage production that's tremendously engaging, giving a dreamlike impression of old Beijing that amply supports the Emperor's description of it as a world of menace and cruelty that Calaf should simply walk away from. Yet this effect is achieved only by elaborate make-up, close-ups, masks, dance and painted scenery — scenery that's evocative even in monochrome.

Somehow I found this *Turandot* uniquely haunting. The overwhelming impression is of sadness — at the self-imposed virginal loneliness of Turandot herself, which in turn leads to the suicide of the equally lonely and isolated Liu. Even Ping, Pang and Pong are no longer absurd, comic figures here, but three men who are also trapped in the princess's icy, self-mutilating world, and long to escape from it. Corelli's challenging all this seems to isolate him as well, making him a lonely figure trying to change an entire world, and he resembles Wagner's Lohengrin more than anyone else in Puccini. This isolation seems his whole character, so much so that the happy ending feels slightly wrong, and you are set wondering yet again what psychological blockage contributed to Puccini's inability to finish the opera.

The ever-serious and subdued Corelli is the main attraction, but Lucille Udovich as Turandot is strong too, though in no way his equal. The production also boasts Plinio Clabassi in the small role of Timur, Calaf's aged father, and every note he sings is a pleasure. The exceptionally atmospheric stage production, almost opiated, and expressive of a terrible fatalism, was by Mario Lanfranchi.

This, while not perhaps being anyone's *Turandot* of choice, could be many people's second, back-up version. I for one couldn't stop watching it.



LE NOZZE DI FIGARO  
Mozart  
Evans, Guden, Lear  
VAI 4519



TURANDOT  
Puccini  
Corelli, Udovich, Mattioli  
VAI 4300

## Hardcover: US

## When there are no more fish in the sea

*Poop-eating, air-breathing fish may save endangered cod, says Paul Greenberg*

BY ALIX GREENWALD  
BLOOMBERG

Wearing a borrowed pair of orange rubber overalls and thick wool socks, Paul Greenberg was an unwitting participant in a shady salmon deal on the Yukon River.

In an attempt to conserve the endangered Alaskan king salmon, the state had declared a "subsistence opening" — meaning that fish caught could only be used for personal consumption.

After Greenberg's Yupik Eskimo hosts inadvertently caught a king salmon, they pulled their tiny metal skiff up to a black oil tanker and banged on the hull. Out came "a dude" who gave them 13.6kg of frozen chicken and beef from Safeway in exchange for their 13.6kg of freshly caught king salmon.

In *Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food*, Greenberg uses this unfair trade to illustrate the complicated plight of the king salmon, which are dependent on the Yupik people for conservation just as the Yupik economy relies on them.

He provides a detailed examination of the fishing industry in sections about salmon, sea bass, cod and tuna. He travels the globe exploring not only what has been done wrong, but also where to go from here.

Greenberg, a freelance writer, tells a story that is full of historical and

scientific information, yet reads like a combination of memoir, mystery and adventure novel with a dash of Greek drama and science fiction thrown in.

In a quest to find an alternative to the cod, which has a perilously declining population, Greenberg travels to the city of Can Tho in Vietnam. There he meets Vo Thanh Khon of the aquaculture company Bianfishco, who farms tra, a prospective replacement fish.

One of the most productive food fish, tra didn't have the best reputation when they were introduced to European diners. Greenberg's translator told him this joke:

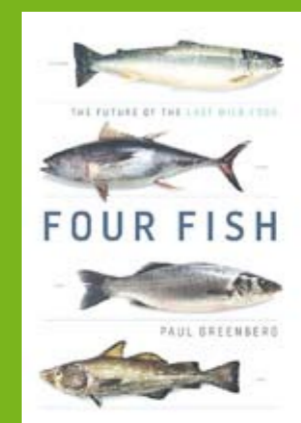
Question: "How do you tell a farmed fish from a wild fish?"

Answer: "The farmed fish is cross-eyed from staring up at the hole in the outhouse."

Tra eat poop, or more gently, "decaying organic matter." They can also breathe air. Tra are fine for "not-so-discerning palates," as Greenberg says, but they don't measure up to cod in texture.

Tilapia, on the other hand, have the same "mouth feel" as cod and breed like rabbits, so they are an even better replacement. They are what humans should have chosen instead of cod as the everyday fish used in foods like the McDonald's Filet-O-Fish.

## PUBLICATION NOTES



FOUR FISH: THE FUTURE OF THE LAST  
WILD FOOD  
BY PAUL GREENBERG  
284 PAGES  
PENGUIN PRESS

Native to Africa, the increasingly popular and easily farmed tilapia spread to Latin America, where Greenberg is told they got caught up in the drug trade. A fish farmer explains, "If you put

a Gel-Pak of cocaine in a crate full of tilapia filets, can a drug-sniffing dog find it? Nope."

When it comes to eating animals, people have focused mainly on four mammals — pigs, sheep, goats and cattle — and four birds — chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. According to anthropologists, even cavemen knew that when choosing animals to domesticate, they should pick varieties that met certain criteria such as hardiness and the ability to breed easily.

Yet in the 1960s, humans decided that "any species could and should be tamed," Greenberg writes. Like cod, sea bass were a poor choice for farming, failing every one of the criteria for domestication.

Cue Israeli endocrinologist Yonathan Zohar, who tells Greenberg he is "like ob-gyn for fish." Zohar is responsible for synthesizing a polymer-based sphere with a hormone that is slowly released into the bloodstream to make sea bass spawn in captivity, which they don't normally do.

Zohar is just one of many quirky characters Greenberg uses in *Four Fish* to walk you through the modern seafood dilemma. He guides you toward commonsense food choices while entertaining you with stories of fish porn, Sea-Monkeys and dynamite.