1 Northeast Asian Critical Security

INTRODUCTION

Much of the contemporary discourse on international security is, for obvious reasons, dominated by terrorism and the systemic implications of the attacks of 9/11. In the wake of these attacks we have seen a resort to traditional security responses in the form of the armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have also seen attempts to redefine warfare to account for the durable character of the terrorist form of threat with a closer policing of state boundaries and an enhanced surveillance of the domestic arena. However, whilst there has been some consideration of the societal factors that have helped to spawn these pathological forces, these have been subordinated to the perceived operational imperatives of fighting a global war on terror. The following study returns to the pre-9/11 debate about security and explores once again the basic issues of a ‘critical’ understanding of security. This study seeks, then, to contribute to a return to a more balanced discussion about the character of contemporary security that allows for the insecurities of the everyday to be the subject of our continuing concern.

This particular book explores non-traditional, ‘critical’ security issues in Northeast Asia. This is not to suggest that 9/11 has not had an impact upon the region. Indeed, we can see its influence in the reinscription of the Chinese Government’s fight against secessionists in its North-Western Xinjiang Province as part of the worldwide fight against terrorism. Again, 9/11 led to the deployment of U.S. forces to bases in the Central Asian Republics and it also gave additional impetus to the development of the Shanghai
Cooperation Organisation based in Beijing as an explicitly regional counter-terrorism initiative.

However, the exploration in this book is a ‘critical’ approach to security that emphasises the apprehension of insecurity understood primarily in existential terms. The book adopts a broader and deeper definition of security threats that embraces threats excluded or marginalised by more traditional definitions. The study thus focuses upon the apprehension of insecurity derived from demographic pressures, profound economic changes, ecological degradation, identificatory challenges, health threats, and political change. The ‘critical’ feature of the study stresses the central importance of civil societal dialogue and cooperative communicative action grounded in principles, processes, and practices of freedom and emancipation.

DEFINING NORTHEAST ASIA

The geographic space with which we are concerned embraces the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Hong Kong (HKSAR), the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan and the Russian Far East (RFE). The region is highly diverse in its geographic character with the great continental countries of China and Russia joined by the sweep of the Korean Peninsula and the islands of Taiwan, Macao and the archipelagic state of Japan. Yet, the contiguity of continental and maritime territories in this geographic area, although breathtaking in its sheer scale and diversity, offers an inescapable geo-political proximity that has given rise to a long history of cultural, economic and political contact between the peoples of this region. Such enduring contact forms the basis of the shared destiny of the inhabitants of Northeast Asia.

The political space with which this study is concerned attracts a variety of labels that reflect the different