

# WHAT IS IN A RIM?

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## China's Growing Integration with the Asia-Pacific Economy

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### China's Growing Integration with the Asia-Pacific Economy

The great enigma in the Pacific area today is the future policy of China. The Korean War of 1950 showed that China was prepared to come to the rescue of a neighboring communist government threatened with military defeat. . . . Subsequent developments—notably the frontier disputes with India, Burma and Pakistan—showed that China has a long arm and a formidable punch. But for China, by tradition a land power, to challenge the American ascendancy in the Pacific would be more difficult than it was for Japan. It would run counter to her history. But history does not show what is possible in the future, only what has happened in the past.<sup>1</sup>

A historian writing about the great powers in the Pacific three decades ago, Morrell's prophecy is partially borne out by the developments in the Asia-Pacific region since the early 1960s. It was Japan, not China, that rose as an economic superpower to challenge the United States both globally and regionally. What was not foreseen, however, was that the newly industrializing countries (NICs) of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong emerged as economic powers in both regional and global economies. The onset of the 1980s not only saw the rapid growth of the ASEAN nations, especially Malaysia and Thailand, into new NICs, but China's growing presence and new role in the Asia-Pacific region.

China's new role in the Asia-Pacific region differs qualitatively from its past one in exporting communist ideology and practice by either confronting the United States in Indochina or supporting indigenous communist insurgencies in the ASEAN countries. China also shifted from settling its border territorial disputes with neighboring India, Vietnam, and the former Soviet Union through military means to engaging in cross-border trade with those countries. Most important, China has focused