

Preface

The intended reader of this book is one who has acquired a basic knowledge of English as a foreign language and has an understanding of geography and economics at that of an early university level. Having stated this it can also be said that the typical reader would be an early university student or white collar workers preparing to take up a position, domestically or abroad, in an English speaking environment. Outside these groups of readers, this book is also a really good reading for anyone who wants to deepen her or his knowledge of the North East Asian (NEA) countries covered. At the same time as a number of economic expressions have been used, the book keeps the language as uncomplicated as possible. Geographic and economic expressions, used are generally given a brief explanation in relation to the setting where they are used for the first time in the text. A reader that needs a wider or deeper explanation to such expressions must refer to the literature of geography and/or economics.

The other basic idea behind writing this book is to try to keep it as updated as possible. Therefore the information presented throughout is based entirely on Internet sources. One major advantage of writing a book solely based on Internet sources is that it should not be outdated as rapidly as normal textbooks, which are often several years old already at printing. Additionally it is intended that the wide variety of links should be able to update the reader on a special figures, a clear indication of where to search. This reader could be one taking a special interest in just the facts or writing an essay/ paper at university or at work. With high-speed Internet connections getting increasingly available also outside some of the main urban centers, in this way looking for information is becoming increasingly effective. All homepages used have been noted by a date of reference, so that in case of the release of a government report, it will be the way to refer to the release date of the material. If the information presented is of a more general character, the date given refers to the date when the homepage was visited. However, there are no exact references to the sources used, as the Internet address indicated will not lead to the exact page where the information in question will be found¹. There are two reasons for this contradiction: the first reason is that the process of writing and publishing a book is much longer than writing shorter papers. As a result of this it can be foreseen that a very large share of such direct links would have become inaccurate by the day they will be accessed by readers. The second reason is that it is hoped that the homepages, when accessed by the active reader, will be able to supply even more up-to-date

¹ Something that I, and hopefully all other teachers at university level, would demand students to supply when handing in any kind of individual written course work containing references to the Internet.

information than what is being used in this book. For this reason, reference is throughout given to the English version of the general homepage, when such a page exists. Also, homepages in other languages have been used as sources, underlining that the usefulness of learning foreign languages can never be underestimated. An alternative way to overcome ones own limited knowledge in a language could be to ask friends/family for help. If this technique is used on more than just a few occasions, it will soon become a far too time-consuming way of working, but it is also sure to strain the relations to once neighborhood.

However, this technique has also been used by the author, in a handful of cases where the five languages spoken have not proven enough (i.e. for Chinese and Japanese). Reading information in its original language should always be encouraged, and the better the language skills are on the part of the researcher, the more fruitful the research process will be.

All Internet-based sources referred to have been visited and information used in the text has generally been found by searching in the “*news*” section of company and organization homepages. The news section is often a good place to start, because if additional material, to what is called news can be found, the right publication is often referred to from that section (or has a direct link if it is well kept homepage). When visiting practically any homepage, it is surprisingly often well worth the time to have a quick look at the frequently available “*publications*” section, as positive surprises are often to be found there. If not so, it still gives the visitor a more hands-on picture of the organization's output, which is more down-to-earth than what is stated in a “*mission statement*” of the organization in question. The information base used in this publication has been obtained during a long time daily reading of Internet-based information sources from the covered countries. Based on a number of key pages in each country to be visited daily, a longer list of pages needs to be visited weekly and yet more occasionally. As a result, what has been read on one homepage has led to a large number of other homepages that needs to be visited to verify statements made elsewhere. Additionally, numerous subscriptions to international information sources, and free e-mail updates daily or weekly, on a verity of subjects, have further widened the information base. On practically all occasions when public organizations, especially in Asia, have been contacted for additional information, this has arrived within days. In perhaps 50% of the cases, the reply given has stated that the requested information is not available or cannot be made public, but nevertheless, there has been a reply.

As the global market economic system has developed in later decades, lifestyles have come to centre upon increased individualism along with increasing efficiency. To fulfill not only individual goals, but also societal, universities have seen an increasing share of teenagers continuing their educational career at

university level. Universities are, in most countries, a public sector function and have been faced by decreasing funding for basic education per student. With increasing costs burdening the university system, the result will undoubtedly be a reduced number of class-hours when students will be given the privilege to sit in class. Alternatively, a need to considerably increasing group sizes will in the same way distance teachers from the students. For the future it is probable that the conventional way of teaching at universities, with teachers lecturing in front of ever larger classes during hours and hours will, although slowly and reluctantly, have to give way for new methods of learning. Education will increasingly have to move away from listening students and teaching teachers to a stage where lectures get fewer and only sum-up, of what is to be studied and to be understood by students. From this follows that there will be a shift in responsibility onto students, who on their own have to find and take-in the information they need. A system change at universities, but also workplaces, that, as for all kinds of system change, will produce both winners and losers. Probable winners are the kinds of student/workers who have a background that has enabled them to freely and individually search for and assess the information needed in every given situation. These are students/workers who will also find their way around in private and public employment and with relative ease will adapt to the rapidly shifting demands in today's and tomorrow's business society. The less successful in the system will be the students/workers that come from a too rigid educational/working background, which has not encouraged sufficient individualism and freethinking analysis of the available material. The search, find, analyze, and to freely decide what is the most important information from the material available/selected will be increasingly important talents. Capabilities that employer will request from both their staff and especially new employee's at all levels. It is in this process of "*search and find*" the numerous Internet sources included in this book are hoped to come into good use. It will make no difference if the needed information is just for curiosity, for a short hand-in, project at work or for a final dissertation to crown years of university studies.

Epilogue about methodology:

The Internet based methodology used here is a way to decrease the time lag that is conventionally seen in the publication of information and statistics. It is all about following up at the source of the documents and statistics that in later stages will come out in print and ever, later be referred to in other publications. It is currently so that all major organizations, like e.g. the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, but also practically all national ministries in the NEA region, publish all material digitally as news or links on their homepages. By

visiting a multitude of homepages it is therefore possible to access first hand information at its source at a very early stage. Giving a practically complete set of sources that in a way would not have been possible only 2 – 3 years ago.

Here, as in most other publications, it is only one person that explains a problem or development, which most often, could also be explained differently. The reader should keep this in mind when reading both this text and other material, and, when in doubt, search for alternative sources. However, a “*multiplicity approach*” has been kept in mind when compiling the information used here. An approach that argues for that a problem/issue should be looked upon and explained from several different research fields. This will allow different points of views to be included and in this way, it should be possible to somewhat avoid that it is only one point of view that is expressed. Sadly enough it is seldom so that complicated issues, like the policy of a state or a company, have simple answers, but instead include a multitude of issues that must be considered. These issues are in turn inter-dependent in an often very complicated network with relations as well as reasons that cannot be clearly distinguished. As a result it is not seldom difficult to give a short and clear reply, also to what can seem to be a relatively simple question.

In the same way, as there is a social embeddedness of economic action, there is also a social embeddedness in the way this description has come about, something that in certain ways has affected how things are described here ². The way the shifting identities of economic actors have been mapped out, how the role of context in explaining economic behavior has been described, or sometimes, have not been described. Also, this presentation may be looked upon as some normative construct. The defense could then be that of economic geographic extracts that needs to be presented to widen the understanding of the North East Asian region (NEA). However, the way the facts presented here could, however, be debated. From a methodological point of view, it has been based on a holistic and multiplicity approach, applying a variety of methods and sets of data material. Signaling a parallel use of a wide variety of sources not only intends to give the reader both a chance to follow up, but also find alternative sources of information. Such sources could also make up for eventual deficiencies on behalf of the author. The sole use of Internet as source, will give the reader a much better chance to follow up on information/sources instantly than what the conventional way of using books and journals references can ever provide.

² Embeddedness -> is explained by the on-line Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms “*a story enclosed within a frame of another narrative, as a tale-within-the-tale*”.

Validity, reliability and the reflexivity of the material will only be briefly touched upon. The “*validity*” of the process is to make sure that the collected material is focusing on the right phenomenon and whether it manages to explain what it has intended to explain. “*Reliability*” refers to if the material used and if such materials would lead other researchers to reach the same type of conclusions using the same material; i.e., is the process replicable? A final test would be the “*reflexivity*” of the researcher himself and to consider the explanations that lead to certain conclusions being drawn, and not a different conclusion. Bringing the discussion back to the above-mentioned situation with embeddedness, but this time it could instead be called the writer’s situatedness. The author is a living result of his background and formed by the situation in which facts are studied and selected articles have been written. Together, this gives the background to the “*situatedness*” in which the author has found himself during the process of writing this text. This book, and its content, can be looked upon as a result of my personal embeddedness and situatedness. However, the purpose has been to find and present an as wide and understandable material as possible about the NEA group of countries. At the same time interesting enough to not only give readers a wider understanding, but also guidance in how to look deeper into issues of each reader’s special interest.