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Chapter 23: Response

South Asia is the success story of the late-20th and early-21st centuries. From the most significant case, China, to smaller nations like Vietnam and Bangladesh, the standard of living across South Asia has improved dramatically. This does not mean that the region is without its problems, having traded starvation and famine for pollution and a regional superpower that is not afraid to throw its weight around. However, the region is a testament to the power of globalization and the ability of nations to lift themselves out of poverty.

China, under the liberalization efforts of Deng Xiaoping, achieved the greatest economic growth in human history. That statement is misleading for two reasons though. First, China was starting from an artificially low base. Killing tens of millions of people, destroying your own economy, and then rebuilding it will lead to some impressive growth numbers. Second, China's growth was not fundamentally creative - it just caught up in a big way. Technological innovation was not, and is not, a strongpoint in China(*partially due to cultural factors that failure in an innovative venture, likely to fail, would bring dishonor to the family. The cultural factors are not the only reason, but they are a significant one*). China's growth was based on cheap labor and the ability to produce goods at a lower cost than anyone else. This is not a sustainable model, and China is already feeling the effects of this. Building cities in the middle of nowhere and waiting for people to move into them works when you have a rapidly growing population that is consistently urbanizing, but when that population growth slows(or stops) and the urbanization rate plateaus, the artificial means for growth will stop working. China is reaching its zenith(for the next century or so), as its population is aging and beginning to shrink without having become a high-income nation. The only way for China to continue growing is to innovate, and that is not something that China has shown itself to be capable of. Erratic and unpredictable government policies will become more common as international power, and the myth of infinite growth, fades away.

Being in the same region as China, Vietnam and Bangladesh have taken two very different tacks in regards to industrialization and foreign policy. Vietnam, ironically, has been very open to foreign investment and a significant capitalist presence in its economy. It has recorded big economic growth as a result, and has been able to lift millions of people out of poverty as a result. Still, it is a one-party state, and the government is not afraid to crack down on dissent. Bangladesh, on the other hand, has been a model of fairly open governance and a free press(GENERALLY). It has been industrializing at a rapid pace, outdoing India in most respects. It has also pursued a balancing act between China and the US, and has been able to maintain a fairly independent foreign policy as a result. Still, it is a volatile region, and Bangladesh has been the site of numerous natural disasters and political upheavals.

In conclusion, South Asia is a region of great promise and great peril. It has been growing at a rapid pace, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty, but in the face of falling birth rates and rapid technological advances the climb to prosperity will only get steeper. Despite this, the region has shown itself willing to operate in a globalized world, and has been able to maintain a significant degree of independence in the face of great powers.