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Look West, America

*Strategic Trade Liberalization and the
United States' Future in the Asia-Pacific
Region*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the nineteenth century, the United States has been a significant economic and political presence in the Asia-Pacific region. That has involved periodic clashes with other powers, the most extensive and brutal being with Japan, culminating in the Pacific War of 1941-1945. The United States also participated in — and lost — a regional war in Vietnam. Today, America finds itself embroiled in a significant geopolitical and regional competition with the People's Republic of China.

Amidst these political changes, trade has remained central to America's engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. American entrepreneurs and businesses have long recognized the opportunities for trade in the Asia-Pacific region as well as the subsequent benefits for American consumers and workers. Even before the United States acquired massive territory in the Western half of North America throughout the nineteenth century, American merchants were trading throughout the Pacific Ocean.

Those economic possibilities for Americans remain as alive today as they were in the past. Since the late 2000s, however, new political developments have complicated this picture. Some of the most consequential include changes in China's relationship with the United States, China's ongoing use of neomercantilist trade agreements to try to force Asia-Pacific nations into greater dependency on Beijing, and swings toward protectionism across the political spectrum of American opinion and policy.

Protectionism, however, is detrimental to America's economic and national security interests.¹ This paper lays out a framework for how the United States can advance a trade liberalization agenda for the Asia-Pacific that reflects present geopolitical conditions. National security considerations always shape trade policy and a full liberalization of trade throughout the region is unlikely. Nevertheless, American efforts to promote a *strategic liberalization* of trade with nations throughout the Asia-Pacific region will serve America's economic interests, as well as strengthen America's position in its geopolitical contest with China.

KEY POINTS

1. America is being outmaneuvered by China in the Asia-Pacific region through the latter's use of neomercantilist trade agreements primarily designed to promote Chinese political dominance rather than economic growth. The current US strategy of transactional dealmaking primarily on a nation-by-nation basis, accompanied by significant tariff threats, is an ineffective response to the Chinese use of trade agreements to create deep dependency by countries on Beijing.
2. America can respond to these challenges by pursuing a strategic trade liberalization agenda in the Asia-Pacific region that involves:
 - a. rejecting the ascendant protectionist outlook that dominates important segments of US domestic opinion; and
 - b. recognizing geopolitical realities facing the United States in the Asia-Pacific.
3. America's pursuit of strategic trade liberalization with Asia-Pacific nations can occur through:
 - a. new bilateral trade agreements with important Asia-Pacific nations;
 - b. further liberalizing existing bilateral trade agreements with Asia-Pacific countries; and
 - c. reentering a regional multilateral trade agreement — the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) — and focusing its efforts on lowering tariff and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade between CPTPP member states.
4. America's position vis-à-vis China will be improved to the degree that the United States is able to enhance freedom of trade between countries in the Asia-Pacific.
5. Competition from Asia-Pacific nations will spur innovation, adaptability, and the exchange of ideas (including in industry, manufacturing, and technology) in the American economy and produce the greater economic growth that is crucial for long-term US national security.
 - a. By presenting itself as the champion of Asian-Pacific trade liberalization, the United States can offer a stark contrast to the Chinese model of neomercantilism and creeping political control.

INTRODUCTION

In 1890, the US Census Bureau's superintendent, Robert P. Porter, declared the closure of the American frontier. The great American westward trek across the continent that had begun in the 1700s was over. Americans, however, kept looking westward, not least by gazing toward the Asia-Pacific and its great economic possibilities.

Trade has long been central to that vision of America's presence in the Asia-Pacific. The United States' first formal treaty with an Asian nation — the 1833 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between America and the Kingdom of Siam — was primarily focused on trade relations. But America's trade engagement with the region accelerated after World War II following the United States' victory over Imperial Japan. Trade relations were further bolstered as the epicenter of the global economy began to shift away from the North Atlantic in the 1960s. Since then, Western Europe's share of world GDP has continued to diminish in favor of Asia-Pacific nations.² In April 2025, three of the world's five biggest economies in terms of nominal GDP — specifically, the United States, the People's Republic of China, and Japan — were located in the region.³

Growing awareness of this change in the global economy played a role in President Barack Obama's November 2011 statement (delivered, not coincidentally, before the Parliament of Australia) in which he announced the following:

As President, I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision — as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.

Let me tell you what this means. First, we seek security, which is the foundation of peace and prosperity. We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully. That's the future that we seek.⁴

Here we see Obama mixing an emphasis on US national security with a commitment to trade liberalization, along with promoting the growth of “liberal international order” throughout the region. Obama’s insistence on calling the United States “a Pacific nation” underscored the US position that America’s presence in the Asia-Pacific region was not only a geographical fact; it also indicated that America considered much of its political and economic future to be firmly located in the region.

Since 2016, however, the US government has significantly shifted its approach to trade in general, and trade relations in the Asia-Pacific region in particular. Three presidential administrations have moved US trade policy away from free trade agreements (FTAs) and pursuing the type of multilateral framework for trade liberalization that was taken as a given in Obama’s speech. That agenda has been sidelined in favor of America using tariffs and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) as part of a unilateral attempt to reset US trade relations with every other nation in the world through a highly transactional deal-making approach, primarily on a nation-by-nation basis.

While this new strategy, and the associated use of tariffs, is often presented as part of a negotiating stance, Americans’ turn to a unilateral protectionist outlook also reflects considerable emerging skepticism, transcending the political spectrum, about the general trade-stance adopted by the United States since 1945.

As the former trade official Michael L. Beeman writes, “America’s sharp trade policy swerves to the New Right and the Progressive Left have bent both ends of the US political spectrum back toward each other and into rough alignment in a new policy dimension.”⁵ That new policy outlook is premised on the (misguided) belief that trade liberalization has undermined the US economy and that America has lost more economically and politically than it has gained by diminishing barriers to freer economic exchanges between its citizens and people in other nations.

American trade policy is consequently in a state of flux and likely to remain so over the next decade. At present, there is little prospect of America returning to the postwar stance that broadly prevailed from the Truman administration to the Obama administration. That, however, constitutes an opportunity for American policymakers concerned about the long term to outline how America might pursue a trade liberalization policy throughout the Asia-Pacific while remaining cognizant of the geopolitical realities in the region. Providing such a framework — a strategic trade liberalization approach — in deliberately broad strokes is the purpose of this paper. But before presenting this framework, we need to provide some theoretical and historical context to outline:

- Why trade liberalization is preferable to protectionism.
- The general history of American trade policy toward the Asia-Pacific region.
- The economic stakes involved in getting US trade policy toward the Asia-Pacific right.

FREE TRADE CREATES WEALTH

Any reflection on an American trade liberalization policy toward the Asia-Pacific region requires a reminder of the benefits of free trade for *Americans*. By trade liberalization, I mean the steady reduction of tariffs and non-tariff barriers that impose costs on exchange between people and businesses based in different countries. In economic terms, trade liberalization produces greater wealth and improves the overall economic welfare of Americans over time.

The evidence for this is frankly overwhelming. First, we know that trade liberalization accelerates per-capita GDP growth. One study of trade reform's impact upon growth found:

a 25 percent reduction in the tariff on capital or intermediate goods is associated with a 0.75-1 percentage point increase in economic growth for liberalizers compared with non-liberalizers. They show a dramatic divergence in the path of real per capita GDP between the two groups: By 2004 the liberalizers were 10 percent above the 1975-98 trend of both and non-liberalizers had fallen almost 10 percent below trend, creating a 15-20 percent gap between the two sets of countries.⁶

A more recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2017 analysis of the trade-growth relationship illustrated how trade across borders significantly contributes to increases in per capita income. It estimated that “a one percentage-point increase in trade openness raises real per capita income by two to six percent.”⁷ The reduction in import costs facilitated by trade liberalization brings substantial welfare gains to high- and low-income Americans, but gains to the poorest American households, as economist Michael E. Waugh found, are four and a half times the gains of the richest American households. In his words, “poor, high marginal utility households — which are very sensitive to price — will tend to benefit more from trade than rich households.”⁸

Such benefits and the growth which drives them are facilitated by the way in which trade liberalization expands the division of labor across borders. This greater specialization, in turn, stimulates more efficiency and productivity from businesses. Workers gravitate to more productive economic sectors where higher wages are invariably to be found. Under free-trade conditions, the value of people's real wages increases, insofar as they can buy more goods and services which have, thanks to trade liberalization, become less expensive. Consumers are thus the direct and ultimate beneficiaries of trade liberalization.

Second, the competition from abroad sparked by ever-expanding trade makes businesses more resilient and adaptable. Exposure to greater foreign competition compels companies to face that their viability is perpetually open to challenges from existing and potential domestic rivals, but also from international competitors. This incentivizes them to constantly evaluate what they are doing and why they are doing it. The deeper and wider the competition, the more businesses are subject to unrelenting pressures to innovate, reassess their comparative advantage, streamline their organizations, shrink costs, find less-expensive inputs, take their products into new markets, reorganize their distribution systems, and thereby lower their prices while maintaining profit margins. Again, consumers benefit as a consequence of businesses doing things more efficiently.

No doubt, the intensification of competition can be unsettling for American businesses and workers alike. The alternative, however, is an America cowering behind tariff walls, pretending that people abroad are not willing to work as hard or be as innovative as Americans, or that economic truths like comparative advantage do not apply to Americans, or that sectoral change can be avoided in the American economy, or that some unproductive forms of employment can be preserved without incurring enormous long-term costs. Adopting such a mindset and embracing corresponding policies is not optimal for the US economy, nor the long-term well-being of Americans.⁹

TRADE AMIDST GEOPOLITICS

The basic theory of free trade and the empirical evidence for trade liberalization's economic benefits are well established. Moreover, most Americans recognize the opportunities offered by trade with other nations, be it the

possibility of purchasing products at lower prices than it would otherwise cost to produce the same goods in America, or the prospect of the profits to be made from selling American goods in foreign markets.

Trade policy, however, occurs in a world of sovereign nation-states, not an economics textbook. Politically mediated agreements and treaties are subject to often-changing national rivalries and competition. Indeed, trade agreements are regularly pursued in conjunction with attempts to realize specific national security objectives. America's trade relationships in the Asia-Pacific region are no exception. Some understanding of this history is important for contextualizing the future of US trade relationships in the region.

America's engagement in trade in the Asia-Pacific region dates to the eighteenth century. In 1784, an American ship, *The Empress of China*, became the first American ship to sail from the young American republic — then still a loose confederation of states, rather than the more unified constitutional regime that emerged in 1790 — all the way to China. Sixty years later, the United States signed the 1844 Treaty of Wangxia with Imperial China, thereby securing access to Chinese markets for American merchants. Nine years later, Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed his four “black ships” into Tokyo Bay to demand that the until-then closed nation of Japan open its markets to American goods. The result was the Treaty of Kanagawa, signed in 1854.

This marked the beginning of an extended period of US-Japanese trade that persisted until the 1930s. Following Japanese aggression in China throughout that decade, the United States gradually placed sanctions on specific goods (particularly oil and scrap steel) being exported to Japan and then imposed a full trade embargo on exports to Japan throughout 1940 and 1941 after Japanese army and naval units occupied French Indochina. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, however, considerable efforts were made by Washington and Tokyo to put US-Japan trade relations back on a productive and mutually beneficial footing, though tensions have continued to exist.¹⁰

The subsequent postwar renewal of US-Japan trade relations formed part of a broader US Cold-War effort to expand American trade globally, with a major objective being to counter the expansion of Communism. As in Western Europe, the opening and re-establishment of trade links was accompanied by the signing of several alliance treaties with Asia-Pacific nations. This included countries like Australia and New Zealand (the 1951 ANZUS treaty), South Korea (the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty), Japan (the 1952 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan), the Philippines (the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines), and the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communique that

formed the basis of America's modern security arrangements with Thailand. Overlying all this was the now-defunct Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) created following the signing of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty in 1954.

Many of these initiatives were part of the "San Francisco System," which created a set of bilateral alliances with key Asian-Pacific nations in which the United States was the "hub" and its allies the "spokes." This contrasted with the single, integrated alliance NATO model that the United States took the lead in establishing in Western Europe in 1949. The context in which the San Francisco System operated changed in subsequent decades. Decolonization, for example, significantly reduced the strategic role once played by European nations like France, Britain, and the Netherlands in Asia. The rapprochement between the United States and mainland China realized during the Nixon administration also had major implications for how America engaged its strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific, as did America's involvement in, and loss of, the Vietnam War.

These changes were paralleled by shifts in US trade policy from the 1950s onwards. Berkeley political scientist Vinod Aggarwal identifies the following stages in America's trade stance toward the Asia-Pacific, from the postwar period until 2008:

The first, from World War II to the mid-1950s, can be characterized as a strong commitment to multilateralism and open trade. The second phase from the mid-1950s to the early-1980s can be termed 'liberal protectionism' — a pragmatic approach to buying off losers from trade liberalization by providing them with temporary restrictions on trade (some of which, such as textiles and apparel, that grew into widespread protection). From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the US shifted to the promotion of regionally focused accords in conjunction with the Uruguay Round. Finally, from the mid-1990s to 2008, the US pursued competitive liberalization, with an emphasis on both open sectoral and bilateral trade arrangements.¹¹

One consistency transcending these shifts was America's leadership in establishing the rules for international trade. This was partly realized through the United States taking an active lead in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) created in 1941 and which became the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

On one level, this process resulted, Beeman shows, in the development of rules which injected a high degree of *predictability* and *certainty* into the international trading system.¹² But, Beeman notes, US officials also worked

hard to ensure that the GATT and WTO rules governing trade served *America's* long-term economic and strategic interests — not those of an amorphous global world order. Another advantage conferred by the WTO on the United States was that it provided an established forum in which America, by virtue of its ongoing status as the world's economic superpower, could exercise huge influence upon global trade and slowly negotiate a wider opening of global markets to *American* commerce.

ECONOMIC NATIONALISM REDUX

Multilateral trade liberalization was thus pursued by Washington through international institutions, with an eye to promoting US national interests. In the late 2000s, this approach began to fall apart, thereby creating many of the conditions presently shaping US trade engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. In the first place, substantial conflicts emerged between China and America over the former's use of subsidies to bolster exports of particular goods (e.g., solar panels, electric cars, etc.) into global markets, including the United States.¹³ As Stephen Ezell illustrates, China also failed to abide by some basic commitments expected of any WTO member “on issues such as industrial subsidization, protection of foreign intellectual property, forcing joint ventures and technology transfer, and providing market access to services industries.”¹⁴ Furthermore, far from embracing the broader trade liberalization agenda expected of WTO entrants, Chinese domestic and international economic policies were more akin, as we will see, to those of an eighteenth-century mercantilist state.¹⁵

The impact of these changes upon American policymakers was signaled by three developments. First, the Obama administration withdrew from the Doha Round of global trade negotiations in 2015. This move was driven, as former United States Trade Representative Michael B.G. Froman summarizes, by concerns “that the resulting agreement would have locked in preferential treatment for China at the expense of the United States and the rest of the world.”¹⁶

The second development, and one that indicated deepening skepticism about the WTO's utility, was the Obama administration's effort to build a new America-centered regional trade structure in the Asia-Pacific via the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This also reflected growing concerns about China's economic and political ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region, especially after Xi Jinping's ascension to power in China. By the mid-2015s, it was apparent

that post-Cold-War ambitions to build a type of liberal international order were coming undone. The US-China competition had become the heart of a renewed geopolitical contest, with the Asia-Pacific rim constituting the primary theatre in which that conflict is being played out.

The third sign of political change driving a major rethinking of trade policy was the election of Donald Trump — a long-term critic of postwar US trade policy¹⁷ — as President. The subsequent political shift was reflected in the first Trump administration's National Security Strategy document, issued in 2017. Many national security policies of previous administrations, the document stated, had been “based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners.” But, the document bluntly added, “For the most part, this premise turned out to be false.”¹⁸

It wasn't only conservative Americans who believed the promise of free trade had soured. In 2018, two former senior Obama administration officials stated in a *Foreign Affairs* article that Democratic and Republican administrations “had been guilty of fundamental policy missteps on China.”¹⁹ That included mistaken assumptions that China's entry into the WTO would help promote the gradual liberalization of other spheres of life in an otherwise highly authoritarian political culture.

From 2017 onwards, US trade policy toward the Asia-Pacific region underwent a dramatic upheaval. Alongside withdrawing from TPP in January 2017, the first Trump administration and then the Biden administration integrated the more expansive use of tariffs into US trade policy, with a particular emphasis upon America's trade relationship with China. Then, on April 2, 2025, the Trump administration announced Executive Order 14257,²⁰ outlining a new “Liberation Day” US tariff schedule. This imposed a 10-percent baseline tariff on imports into America from nearly all countries beginning April 5, as well as higher tariffs on imports from 57 specific countries, including many Asian-Pacific nations. The break from the American stance that prevailed from the 1980s until the late-2000s, vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific region, could not have been starker.

By mid-2025, any prospects for a rules-based liberal international trading system were dead. They were replaced, Froman stresses, “by a flagrant disregard for any semblance of a rules-based system and a clear preference for a power-based system to take its place. Even if pieces of the old order manage to survive, the damage is done: there is no going back.”²¹ And to this we should add: the primary players that undone the rules-based order are the People's Republic of China and the United States of America — the

world's two most powerful nations and the two most significant players in the Asia-Pacific region. For better or worse, the question of the future of trade throughout the Asia-Pacific lies in their hands.

HIGH STAKES, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL

This background underscores how America's trade stance vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific region is presently being driven by reactions to the way China is engaging with the region, the discrediting of multilateral trade liberalization, and the influence of economic nationalist ideas in US domestic politics. These developments, however, make it all the more critical that US policymakers understand the stakes involved in getting trade policy right in this region.

The sheer size of the economies of the Asia-Pacific region alone should focus American minds. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the world economy was dominated by the United States, Great Britain, and other European nations such as Germany and France. But 125 years later, things were different. By April 2025, the IMF listed the United States as the world's biggest economy in nominal GDP terms (\$30.51 trillion), followed by China (\$19.23 trillion). Japan was listed as the world's fifth-largest economy (\$4.19 trillion).²²

Another way to demonstrate the region's economic significance is to look at the twenty-one nations that belong to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. APEC was established in 1989 with the goal of promoting free trade and economic cooperation among Asia-Pacific nations. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the 21 member economies that made up APEC in 2023 accounted for "approximately 38 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of the world's total GDP and 47 percent of the world's trade." In 2023, total APEC GDP (which includes US GDP) was a staggering \$63.8 trillion, and "US goods and services trade with APEC totaled an estimated \$3.8 trillion" that same year.²³

The sheer scale of these numbers underscores the opportunities that great economic integration into the Asia-Pacific region represents for America. But separating trade issues from national security concerns is never easy. Over the past fifteen years, China's expanding economic engagement in the region has been accompanied by efforts to improve its strategic presence throughout the Asia-Pacific.²⁴ Beijing has created new trade agreements with many Asia-Pacific nations and upgraded several other existing trade agreements.

Prominent examples include:

- The China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] Free Trade Agreement, first signed in 2011, upgraded in 2015, which regulates trade between China and the 10 ASEAN member states.
- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signed in 2020, by 15 Asia-Pacific countries (China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and the 10 ASEAN member states). It is presently the largest trade agreement by GDP.²⁵
- The China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA), originally signed in 2008, and given a Further Upgrade Protocol that became effective on December 31, 2024.
- The China-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, originally signed in 2008, and given an upgrade that came into force on April 7, 2022.
- The China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) that entered into force on December 20, 2015.

In 2025, China was also negotiating several other FTAs, or working on joint feasibility studies for possible FTAs, with other Asia-Pacific nations. These include proposals for a China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (CJSK-FTA); a China-Canada FTA; and a China-Papua New Guinea FTA.

China's more recent trade agreements need to be placed in the context of its regional geopolitical ambitions, especially Beijing's extensive use of neomercantilist policies. In domestic terms, this presently translates into the ruling party-state apparatus placing even tighter constraints upon the economic freedom of entrepreneurs and investors, bringing more and more Chinese businesses under direct state control, putting more party officials on company boards, demanding that CEOs inscribe China's national goals directly into their business plans, and requiring state-run banks to shift more credit toward state-run enterprises and away from more-or-less private companies.²⁶ As far as Beijing's approach to trade is concerned, economist Fu-Lai Tony Yu describes China's neomercantilist strategies as including:

stockpiling gold and foreign reserves and striving for favorable balance of payment via exchange rate manipulation, tariff, export subsidies, and other trade protections. The Chinese government [also] initiates "Belt and Road" projects and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to counter American and Western influences and deploys strategic expansion in Africa, South Asia, and Latin American countries.²⁷

In trade agreements initiated by Beijing, this neomercantilist approach expresses itself in 1) “low quality . . . liberalization because they are driven largely by political, not economic, considerations” and 2) a “preference for narrower, incomplete initial agreements that are progressively expanded over time.”²⁸ The point of the incompleteness and lack of detail is to give Chinese officials the space and time which it needs to exert pressure to make its trade partners more dependent on Beijing over time. By focusing on politically sensitive economic sectors such as minerals or energy, China seeks to create constituencies inside trade partner countries that will advance its broader political interests in return for ongoing access to Chinese markets. As the international relations scholar Michael Sampson states, “a country that is highly dependent on exporting a particular good to the Chinese market at a very high volume will find it difficult to switch elsewhere without incurring substantial costs given the almost unmatched size of the Chinese market.”²⁹

A good example of how Chinese neomercantilism manifests itself in trade agreements is China’s participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Led primarily by Beijing, RCEP was designed, in part, to orientate trade toward China and away from the United States. The accord commingled the interests of 15 high-, middle-, and low-income Asia-Pacific nations, including US allies like Japan, Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines. As one scholar wrote at the time of RCEP’s signing:

RCEP . . . has little substantive to say on industrial subsidies or state-owned enterprises, almost certainly a nod to Beijing’s desire to safeguard its own domestic economic management tools. . . . Beijing will use its economic heft . . . to exert influence on regulations and standards setting within the bloc, as it is already explicitly trying to do in the countries included in its Belt and Road Initiative.³⁰

RCEP did produce some harmonization of rules of origin and some standardization of customs procedures. RCEP’s ambiguities let China avoid reforming at home while pressuring others to adopt its regulatory model — part of Beijing’s broader effort to spread its neomercantilist system beyond its borders. China’s trade agreements replicate its economic model of power and control, in stark contrast to freer market capitalism that the United States once championed throughout the world.

To be sure, Beijing’s effort to advance its economic place in the Asia-Pacific region through a multiplicity of trade agreements has created complications for China’s trade with Asia-Pacific nations. As former World Bank Chief Economist Anne O. Kruger pointed out in the late-1990s, a series of overlapping FTAs can facilitate the type of complicated trade environments that free

trade is supposed to supplant.³¹ People engaged in cross-border trade find themselves having to navigate conflicting and inconsistent trade regimes. Every new trade agreement also provides fresh opportunities for lobbyists, leveraging loopholes to secure new protections and privileges. They also furnish new grounds for endless litigation by trade lawyers.³²

The proliferation of such inefficiencies affects China as much as it does the other players involved in one or more of the trade arrangements listed above. That reality must be balanced against the fact that, in all the above-listed regional agreements, China is the biggest economic and political power. That puts China in a far stronger negotiating position and increases the odds that Chinese proposals will prevail in trade disputes. To that extent, the complexity generated by a multiplicity of agreements often serves China's *political* interests (though not necessarily its economic well-being) at other nations' expense.

UNILATERAL TRANSACTIONALISM HURTS AMERICANS

Since 2016, the predominant US policy response to these maneuverings on China's part has been a shift toward mild protectionism and then even further toward unilateral transactionalism. Certainly, like China, the United States has maintained its own web of trade arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region. This includes FTAs with Australia, Korea, Japan, Chile, Peru, and Singapore as well as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). America also has trade and investment framework arrangements in place with ASEAN, Brunei, Malaysia, Fiji, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

None of these agreements, however, could be described as advancing a radical free trade agenda. Yet there is little dispute that a free trade outlook was more influential than economic nationalist positions in shaping these agreements. That free trade mindset on the part of American policymakers was especially evident in the way the United States used its membership of APEC to try and advance broader trade liberalization. This was partly a consequence of the WTO's growing unwieldiness. As it expanded from 76 to 164 member countries, the WTO found it harder to build consensus positions. APEC, by contrast, was a smaller (21 members), more geographically aligned group. APEC offered another advantage for trade reform: members

didn't have to be sovereign states. Instead, membership is based on being an "independent economic entity." Not only did this allow Hong Kong and Taiwan to be APEC members beside mainland China; it reflected the hope of some policymakers in the 1990s that it might be possible to distinguish trade relationships in the region from national security questions.

Confidence that such distinctions can be made has declined in the wake of fundamental changes in the US-China relationship since 2012 and ongoing clashes between Beijing and successive US presidential administrations over trade policy. The second Trump administration has intensified America's tariff campaign to change China's behavior through a unilateral, transactional approach to trade policy. The goal is to secure trade deals that, the administration believes, will leave the United States economically better off. But there are good reasons to doubt that this will occur.

Frequent changes to the second Trump administration's tariff policies — delays, revisions, and shifting targets — make them difficult to model. That said, studies of the effects of the administration's policies announced, for example, with the revised tariff schedule outlined in the Liberation Day executive order of April 2, 2025, indicate negative effects on US consumers. The Penn Wharton Budget Model states that this tariff schedule "will reduce long-run GDP by about six percent and wages by five percent. A middle-income household faces a \$22,000 lifetime loss. These losses are twice as large as a revenue-equivalent corporate tax increase from 21 percent to 36 percent, an otherwise highly distorting tax."³³

Similarly dismal results resulted from the Peterson Institute for International Economics' modelling of five different scenarios based on the tariffs announced (and changed) between April 2 and May 5, 2025. This modelling found that:

- "The tariffs significantly reduce US and global economic growth and increase inflation in many economies, depending on how countries respond."
- "Contrary to the claim that the tariff policy will spur an industrial revival in the United States, the tariffs disproportionately hurt the US agriculture and durable manufacturing sectors in terms of output losses, lower employment, and price increases."
- Financial markets' reaction to the Liberation Day tariffs in the form of "the depreciation of the dollar" and "the sharp rise in US bond yields" "suggest a rise in global perceptions of the relative risk of holding US assets — a rise in the risk premium demanded by investors." This mag-

nification of risk will accentuate “US losses in employment and income as foreign capital flows away from the United States to other countries.”³⁴

These forecasts suggest that serious domestic economic difficulties for the United States will flow from the second Trump administration’s trade policies. One such problem concerns how the tariffs will incentivize American companies to focus on extracting privileges from the US government rather than seeking to out-innovate and outcompete their domestic and foreign rivals. America’s growing use of protectionist measures, Beeman states, will create “new opportunities for interest groups to try [to] capture favorable decisions from America’s policymakers, [thereby] opening the door for further discrimination among them as well.”³⁵

The ever-changing US tariff schedule will create a cash bonanza not only for lobbyists, but for trade lawyers with a clear incentive to keep trade regulations as numerous and byzantine as possible. Then there are the growing inefficiencies and higher costs these tariffs will consequently inflict on American businesses, raising prices for American consumers even when they buy domestically.

WHITHER TRADE FREEDOM?

Will America reverse its present trade trajectory in the Asia-Pacific region? At present, that seems unlikely. The political momentum remains with protectionists. Moreover, while opinion polls in mid-2025 indicated that most Americans favor free trade,³⁶ that positive disposition always comes with many unspoken caveats. Americans may favor trade liberalization on a generic level, but some will insist *their* state, *their* town, *their* industry, or *their* company merits some degree of protection. And when the subject of China is introduced, the numbers favoring free trade immediately trend downwards.³⁷

In short, many Americans have less-than-straightforward views on trade. Economic nationalists know this, and ruthlessly exploit Americans’ diffidence about trade to cobble together election-winning coalitions. Compounding the problem, no American political leader of sufficient gravitas is currently waving the free-trade flag.

The question for those convinced of the economic case for trade liberalization thus becomes: *How does the United States advance a trade liberalization agenda in the Asia-Pacific region in a manner cognizant of geopolitical realities, most notably*

Beijing's neomercantilist approach to the region? Americans should be capable, despite the challenges, of realizing the enormous economic opportunities of strategic trade engagement in one of the world's fastest-growing regions. It makes neither economic nor political sense for the United States to allow Beijing to slowly turn the Asia-Pacific rim into a Chinese-dominated economic lake, from which America is excluded or excludes itself. Nor is it obvious how a slow US retreat from the world's most dynamic economic region would promote America's national security interests.

Certainly, a general overall lowering of trade barriers for all nations (of the type pursued from the 1990s until the late-2000s) would avoid the problems associated with overlapping trade agreements. The WTO's ability to advance a multilateral trade liberalization agenda for all its members remains limited, however, and there is no indication that this will change in the short to medium term.³⁸ No major multilateral trade agreement has been successfully pursued and concluded under the WTO's auspices since the Uruguay Round (1986-1994). Although the Doha Development Round started in 2001, it has not been concluded and there is no prospect of this occurring anytime soon, especially given post-2016 shifts in US trade policy. Thus far, post-1994 WTO multilateral agreements have been limited to extremely specific goals, such as the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted on June 17, 2022. Even that narrowly focused rule has not been ratified by the required two-thirds of WTO members, illustrating the sheer difficulty in reaching comprehensive multilateral agreement.

Americans anxious to liberalize trade in the Asia-Pacific must consider other options. One way forward is for the United States to pursue a *three-pronged strategic trade liberalization strategy*. This would involve:

- Further liberalizing *existing bilateral trade agreements* with those Asia-Pacific countries with whom it already has such agreements.
- Pursuing *new bilateral trade agreements* with important Asia-Pacific nations which are focused upon reducing tariffs and NTBs.
- Reconstructing a US-led *regional multilateral trade agreement* through the CPTPP in which the primary focus is upon lowering tariffs and diminishing NTBs among CPTPP members.

Admittedly, this strategic trade liberalization agenda risks adding to the proliferation of trade agreements, generating some conflicts and contradictions. Nonetheless, this approach realistically appreciates the geopolitical challenges of the Asia-Pacific that no responsible US trade policy can ignore. Moreover, it stands in sharp contrast to China's neomercantilist model, re-

lying instead on expanding market freedom between the United States and its current and prospective Asia-Pacific partners.

LIBERALIZING BILATERALLY

In bilateral terms, *a first step* would be for the United States to engage those Asia-Pacific countries with which it already has existing FTAs with proposals to further liberalize these agreements. A free trade agreement between the United States and any country is just a start, serving as a platform for further negotiations, especially for greater market access and trade between partnered nations.

Most particularly, long-standing US allies like Korea, Australia, and Japan might be engaged in talks to further diminish the tariffs and NTBs still inhibiting trade. Such upgrades could also involve targeted initiatives such as freeing up digital trade and e-commerce between these countries, thereby growing the access of American tech companies to these markets. America could, for instance, seek to update its FTA with Singapore, as tech companies in both countries deepen links stretching back to 1987. Such cooperation would surely increase the number of start-ups in both nations.³⁹

A second step would be to pursue bilateral trade agreements that liberalize US trade with geopolitically critical Asia-Pacific nations such as Vietnam and Indonesia. These nations have large consumer markets (the population of Indonesia alone is 284 million people) that contain opportunities for US exporters. Specific trade nuisances (such as poor enforcement of intellectual property rights, a perennial problem in developing nations) could be addressed on a nation-by-nation basis throughout the Asia-Pacific.

American importers and exporters would have to navigate the contradictions generated by America entering into new bilateral agreements with different Asia-Pacific nations. The upside is that deeper and more bilateral agreements of a liberalizing nature would tie these countries' economies more closely into the US economy, facilitate economic growth in the United States and these nations, and help counter Chinese pressures upon these countries to put more distance between them and the United States. Even more significantly, bilateral liberalizing trade agreements would build momentum to help the United States realize an even bigger trade objective: the development of a US-led multilateral *regional* market-liberalizing agreement. Embracing an increasing number of

Asia-Pacific nations would further blunt China's ability to realize its geopolitical and neomercantilist ambitions.

FROM BILATERAL TO REGIONAL

Any regional trade agreement (RTA) typically involves countries (usually, though not always, geographically adjacent in some way or enjoying certain political and historical ties) agreeing to reciprocal arrangements to standardize trade barriers between the participating nations. The form assumed by an RTA can vary, from customs unions to free trade zones. They can focus on tariffs but also NTBs. In some cases, they specify particular treatment of investments and services among signatories to the agreement.

As the WTO points out, "These deals, by their very nature, are discriminatory as only their signatories enjoy more favorable market-access conditions."⁴⁰ This is one reason why the WTO's formal documents express only mildly favorable views of RTAs. These texts typically insist that RTAs "must remain complementary to, not a substitute for, the multilateral trading system."⁴¹ The concern is that many, if not most trade questions can only be properly addressed via the multilateral framework established by the WTO. Given, however, the WTO's ongoing paralysis, an American-led RTA is a more politically plausible route for the United States to promote trade liberalization and advance its economic and political interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Of course, the content and underlying logic of such an agreement would matter a great deal. An American-led RTA that effectively encouraged its members to embrace neomercantilist policies (i.e., the present Chinese trade model) would neither advance trade liberalization nor serve the interests of American consumers. There is also the question of whether such an agreement would remain closed to any group beyond the original signatories, or whether it could be opened to others.

This is where injecting a *plurilateral* dimension into such an RTA could help. Plurilateral trade arrangements involve a set of nations agreeing on new trade commitments and then either extending the benefits to all members on a most-favored-nation (MFN) basis, or offering non-signatories the opportunity to enter into such agreements at a future date.⁴² As the WTO understands plurilateral arrangements, they embrace cases whereby:

certain member states may agree on rules on trade in specific subjects that not all Member States may agree to. As such, plurilateral agreements come to the fore where there is no multilateral consent. These plurilateral agreements therefore only bind Member States that have signed up to them.⁴³

An American-led Asia-Pacific RTA grounded on such plurilateral principles could offer a pathway for the United States to gradually draw Asia-Pacific nations into a free-trade orientated RTA focused on a limited number of goals, at the heart of which is the promotion of greater economic liberty — specifically, a progressive lowering of tariffs and NTBs between the countries. Such an RTA would thus offer a genuinely market-orientated alternative to China's neomercantilist trade arrangements.

How might this RTA with plurilateral characteristics be advanced by the United States? One option would be for America to revisit the defunct Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and its successor arrangement — the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) — by joining and leading it in market-liberalizing directions.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Developed under American leadership from the 2000s onwards and signed by the United States and the other 11 members (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam) on February 4, 2016, TPP was not ratified by America. It encountered immense domestic opposition in the United States from groups such as economic nationalists and trade unions. The US subsequently withdrew from TPP in February 2017.

The topics addressed in TPP's 30 chapters ranged from the level of tariffs applied to goods and services to mechanisms for resolving disputes between signatories. The treatment of environmental and labor standards, intellectual property, and regulations concerning e-commerce were also included. Additionally, TPP contained many provisions having little to do with trade, such as the maintenance of cultural diversity, the right to develop healthcare systems, and supporting the development of small and medium-sized businesses. At the time, however, the USTR described TPP's primary objective and achievement in the following manner:

The TPP eliminates or reduces tariff and non-tariff barriers across substantially all trade in goods and services and covers the full spectrum of trade, including goods and services trade and investment, so as to create new opportunities and benefits for our businesses, workers, and consumers.⁴⁴

Some of the most substantive of these reductions in barriers were aimed at manufacturing goods, agricultural products, and textiles. This was to be accompanied by eliminating restrictions on cross-border services and opening markets to greater foreign investment among members.

In presenting its case for Congressional ratification of TPP throughout 2015 and 2016, the Obama administration stressed two points. The first was economic: TPP would open more markets to American goods, creating new opportunities for American businesses and workers. It would also lead to greater and easier foreign investment in the US economy as well as lower prices for American consumers. The second point was geopolitical. In Obama's own words, "we have to make sure the United States — and not countries like China — is the one writing this century's rules for the world's economy."⁴⁵

Throughout 2016, in the face of attacks on TPP by presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump as well as sections of the Progressive Left and New Right, Obama repeatedly stressed that TPP excluded China from its membership. From this standpoint, TPP was understood as a way for America to pursue an Asia-centered strategy that combined the pursuit of economic growth and freer trade with the imperative of underscoring that there would be no geopolitical retreat on America's part from the Asia-Pacific in the face of China's determination to stamp its political preferences on the region. Awareness of the geopolitical stakes also underlay the 2016 warning by Singapore's prime minister Lee Hsien Loong that China is "engaging all of the countries in the region around its own version of trade agreements, and they're sure not worried about labor standards, or environmental standards, or human trafficking or anti-corruption measures."⁴⁶

As far as Obama was concerned, the rules needed to include environmental and labor regulations of the type that China had no intention of embracing. "Right now," he argued, "China wants to write the rules for commerce in Asia. If it succeeds, our competitors would be free to ignore basic environmental and labor standards, giving them an unfair advantage over American workers."⁴⁷ These words may be seen as Obama seeking to shore up support for TPP among some of his domestic political constituencies and/or reflective of his own ideological preferences. Nonetheless, TPP *did* lower tariffs and NTBs *more* than RCEP that was being pushed aggressively by China during the same time period.⁴⁸

Significantly, TPP's provisions concerning state-owned enterprises — which have proliferated in China since 2012 — would have significantly inhibited the ability of Chinese state enterprises to operate in TPP signatory nations. This was not a coincidence.

MULTILATERAL, REGIONAL, AND PLURILATERAL

With the benefit of hindsight, the United States' decision to withdraw from TPP now looks to have been a serious error. Leaving aside the economic benefits of freer trade with the 11 other member states, an American-led TPP would have signaled continuation of America's deep economic commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, reassured member states of America's capacity to resist domestic pressures to turn economically inwards, and, above all, demonstrated America's unwillingness to allow the region to become economically dominated by China. Key US allies like Australia, Japan, Korea, and Singapore would have particularly taken heart from an American ratification of TPP. Instead, withdrawal from TPP allowed China to fill the void with the RCEP.

Although the Biden Administration stated its willingness to reconsider American involvement in TPP, it did little to revive the initiative. This reflected the bipartisan turn against trade liberalization in the United States. While the influence of economic nationalists grew within the Republican party, plenty of Democratic-leaning constituencies likewise insisted that their economic well-being had been undermined by free trade initiatives. In his survey of the Biden administration's trade posture, Beeman states that "What became more apparent over time was that it...was a union-centered, and at times union-directed, trade policy."⁴⁹ More generally, Beeman adds, "the administration's trade policy continued to prioritize the fundamentally anti-free trade and broadly anti-corporate views of its trade union and civil society constituents."⁵⁰

Abandonment of TPP did result in the United States effectively ceding a major rule-making role for trade in the Asia-Pacific region and making it easier for Beijing to push through RCEP. The 11 remaining members of TPP (known as the TPP-11) sought to salvage as much as they could of the original TPP, revealing ongoing reservations about China's influence. Signed in March 2018, CPTPP was soon ratified by a majority of members and became effective

for ratifying countries (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam) in December 2018. For a trade agreement, this qualifies as lightning speed. In December 2024, Britain was admitted to the CPTPP.

CPTPP largely replicated TPP, especially concerning tariff reductions. It also retained TPP's high transparency standards for state-owned enterprises — something not to China's liking. Moreover, as economist Matthew P. Goodman pointed out in March 2018, "a total of 22 provisions from the original agreement were suspended or otherwise changed, setting aside issues that were priorities for the United States in the original negotiations but did not enjoy similar support among the other TPP countries."⁵¹ These suspensions mattered, because they sought to make it easier for the United States to enter CPTPP in the future. That signaled a desire to see *more* (rather than less) American economic and political leadership in the Asia-Pacific area.

But while other Asia-Pacific countries — such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Taiwan — have applied to become CPTPP members since 2018, America has not and shows no sign of wanting to do so. By contrast, China announced its desire to join CPTPP in September 2021. This could be read as an indication of Beijing's determination to inhibit any future US administration from using CPTPP as a counterweight to China's geopolitical and economic agendas for the region.

Naturally, some CPTPP members would be wary of allowing the United States back inside this RTA, having been frustrated once by American domestic politics that terminated its TPP participation in January 2017. Many CPTPP members would, however, welcome US reentry. As well as increasing their access to the world's largest economy, it would reduce pressures on them to admit China to CPTPP.

A US reentry into CPTPP would require some humility, as the US would have to concede that leaving TPP was a misjudgment. This would not be the first time that America found itself conceding serious trade policy errors. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 inflicted considerable damage on the US economy by raising American tariffs on imports. It was superseded just four years later by the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, which started returning the United States to a trade liberalization agenda by reducing tariffs.

A comparable American admission about TPP would have to be preceded by something even more difficult: the establishment of a broad bipartisan domestic consensus in favor of a strategic trade liberalization agenda for the Asia-Pacific region. While overcoming opposition would be hard, it is not inconceivable. Should America's more recent embrace of protectionist policies

produce the inefficiencies, cronyism, and higher prices associated with such trade arrangements, the trade policies followed by the Trump I, Biden, and Trump II administrations stand some chance of becoming discredited among critical masses across the American political spectrum.

Granted, overcoming resistance from special interests and their lobbyists who directly benefit from protectionist policies at consumers' and taxpayers' expense would be especially challenging. The special interests that directly benefit from subsidies will fiercely resist any attempt to take away what amounts to corporate welfare. Though large numbers of Americans may have a dim view of government subsidies, organized minorities that stand to gain immediately from subsidies ultimately paid for by American taxpayers are more likely to get their way because the majorities who economically gain from trade liberalization in the long term (like consumers) are dispersed and disorganized. Nonetheless, a resurgence of free trade sympathies on a scale that political leaders find difficult to ignore would create space for trade liberalizers to stress the benefits of greater *American* access to markets throughout the Asia-Pacific as well as draw attention to how an *American*-shaped CPTPP could counter Chinese influence in the region.

The next step for a United States inside CPTPP's fold would be to 1) make further tariff reductions a goal for CPTPP; 2) promote updates to CPTPP that encompass issues like artificial intelligence and digital trade which have assumed greater significance since 2017; and 3) direct more attention to diminishing NTBs or non-tariff measures (NTMs). All three provisions could be given plurilateral status, thereby allowing CPTPP to expand by admitting member-states willing to adopt these market liberalizing provisions.

Reducing the impact of NTBs on CPTPP members would be an especially important feature of such a strategy. Amid impassioned debates about tariffs, NTBs' role in blocking freer trade is often overlooked. Some of the more typical NTBs include the following:

- Government licenses or permits that must be acquired before particular goods can be exported.
- Extremely complicated customs protocols that slow down the speed of trade and thereby increase the costs.
- Technical barriers to trade (TBT) associated with the testing and certification of products before they can be imported or exported.
- Safety standards concerning imports of products such as food can significantly limit trade.
- Subsidies to domestic industries.

In 2019, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific estimated that “Trade costs of NTMs are more than double that of ordinary customs tariffs.”⁵² This only underlines the need for American leadership on this issue. Realizing this objective would be easier in some areas than others. Harmonizing licensing and safety standards, for example, is simpler than achieving agreements on reducing subsidies. These difficulties should, however, not impede the United States from emphasizing the benefits of radically reducing NTBs through CPTPP.

AMERICA WINS

The specific combination of American-led trade-liberalization measures proposed by this paper for the Asia-Pacific region amounts to an ambitious agenda for the expansion of economic liberty and America’s presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Any one of the three prongs — liberalizing existing bilateral agreements with Asia-Pacific nations, entering into new bilateral agreements with critical Asia-Pacific countries, reengaging in multilateral regional arrangements— would require major expenditures of political capital by a presidential administration and legislators alike.

If the United States were to pursue a trade liberalization agenda of the type proposed in this paper throughout the Asia-Pacific, it would confront domestic US bipartisan opposition of the type which is inclined to view extensive American trade with the rest of the world as a zero-sum game in which America is inevitably the loser. It would also encounter obstruction by Beijing who would see a US strategic trade liberalization agenda as implicitly challenging China’s neomercantilist ambitions for the region. These difficulties should not, however, cause us to lose sight of the benefits for the United States if Washington pursued a strategic trade liberalization policy in the Asia-Pacific. To reiterate, these benefits would include:

- Offering economic advantages to American consumers in the form of lower prices, and to American businesses in the form of cheaper inputs as well as the disciplining effects of enhanced competition.
- Giving the US an edge in a geopolitical contest with China.
- Signaling a revival of American ambition to take the lead in setting the rules for trade.

In geopolitical terms, it is always better for a nation to be a rule-setter than a rule-taker. The United States must not cede that role to a China that has a distinctly neomercantilist view of the world's economic future and an authoritarian conception of the nature and ends of politics.

Above all, America's pursuit of strategic liberalization in the Asia-Pacific region would help set the United States up to be the leading player in a twenty-first century in which Asia and the Asia-Pacific will assume the place occupied by European nations in the nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries. The economic and political payoff would be formidable. For that reason alone, it would be a shame if America decided to turn its back on a new Western frontier. Like the frontier of the nineteenth-century United States, the Asia-Pacific offers so much opportunity to any country enterprising enough to seize it.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

Abbreviation

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
ChAFTA	China-Australia Free Trade Agreement
CJSKFTA	China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement
CPTTP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSFTA	China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GDP	Gross Domestic Profit
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MFN	Most-Favored-Nation
NTB	Non-Tariff Barriers
NTM	Non-Tariff Measures
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RTA	Regional Trade Agreement
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Arrangements
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
WTO	World Trade Organization

Endnotes

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⁴⁹ Beeman, *Walking Out*, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵¹ Matthew P. Goodman, “From TPP to CPTPP,” Center for International and Strategic Studies, *Critical Questions* (March 8, 2018), accessed August 16, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tpp-cptpp>

⁵² *Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2019: Navigating Non-tariff Measures towards Sustainable Development* (2019), xiii, accessed August 17, 2025, <https://repository.unescap.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/93123bda-646d-42e1-a689-fb7c7d37ef77/content>



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