

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to introduce this issue of the PEAR Journal, titled *Strategic Currents: Power, Trade, and Influence in a Multipolar World*. In this edition, we present a collection of thought-provoking articles that delve into the intricate interplay between geopolitical forces and economic strategies across different regions. These articles reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of international relations, particularly in an era of shifting power balances and evolving regional orders.

The first paper turns to the Russian Arctic, examining how China leverages economic statecraft to expand political influence in a region traditionally dominated by Russia. The study unpacks China's use of tools such as investment, infrastructure, and energy partnerships to pursue its strategic ambitions, while highlighting how Russia responds to and contains this influence through historical, institutional, and geopolitical means. This analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how rising powers seek influence in regions of strategic significance.

The second paper revisits the trajectory of India's nuclear weapons development program, challenging the widely held belief that China's 1964 nuclear test was the principal trigger. Instead, the article uncovers archival evidence showing that India had already embarked on its weapons-grade plutonium production prior to the Chinese test. By examining India's strategic calculus and institutional evolution, this research reframes our understanding of South Asia's nuclear dynamics and the motivations behind India's nuclear path.

Our third paper offers an early empirical assessment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and its impact on Southeast Asian exports and trade dynamics. Drawing on expert interviews and regional case studies, the article explores how RCEP is reshaping trade flows, boosting intra-regional integration, and influencing the participation of Southeast Asian economies in global value chains. The research also sheds light on the institutional and regulatory challenges that may limit the agreement's full potential.

I hope that our readers find these articles not only informative but also inspiring as they explore the complex intersections of geopolitics and economics. The diverse topics covered in this issue underscore the importance of understanding regional strategies and global trends through a critical and multifaceted lens.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated staff editors—Tu Le, Jan Reiner Wolf, Iliia Gerasimenko, and Ahlim Lee—for their unwavering commitment to the journal. Your hard work and passion are greatly appreciated. To our contributors, thank you for entrusting us with your research. We are honored to feature your work and wish you continued success in your scholarly endeavors.

Duoc Thanh Nguyen
Editor-in-Chief