THE NEW ASIAS
Global Futures of World Regions

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PREFACE

This volume is the outcome of a collaborative research project on Global Futures of World Regions started in 2004 by Wolf Schäfer, Stony Brook, and Gert Schmidt, Erlangen-Nuremberg. Organized as an international, interdisciplinary, and multicountry conference series, the project focused on the new Europe, the new America, and the new Asias. The new Europe conference took place April 14-16, 2005, at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, the new America conference September 22-24, 2005, at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB), and the new Asias conference September 28-29, 2006, at Seoul’s Sheraton Grand Walkerhill Hotel. The chapters of this volume have evolved from the Seoul conference.

Seeking to anchor contemporary globalizations in an influential space below the ultimate level of the entire globe, the project chose world regions and thus sidestepped civilizations, continents, and nation-states as the preferred unit of analysis. The exception, however, was the United States of America. The new America conference did not focus on the bigger North American region, which includes Mexico and Canada, but the imperial U.S. under the George W. Bush administration. World regions are hybrid spaces with mixtures of geographical, cultural, and political elements; their bodies strike a balance between too large and too small; and they are not (not yet) overloaded with national or cultural “myths” of historicity, essence, and identity.

The Global Futures of World Regions conferences had three goals: first, to illuminate the global present by assessing the globalities of leading world regions; second, to outline the potential global futures of these regions; and third, to develop the analytical tools for further comparative analyses. Seen from the vantage points of different locales and perspectives and concentrating on three regions individually, the Global Futures conferences zeroed in on the political, historical, economic, and cultural aspects of each region. The conference participants
agreed that much of the world’s present global history is shaped by the interplay between the
North American region, the European Union, and the new Asias. The African, South American,
and Pacific regions, together with the new third worlds (a metaregion that permeates all global
regions to varying degrees), are yet to be explored by the Global Futures project.

At the new Asias meeting in Seoul, Korea, a large number of papers revealed the
considerable transformation amidst intensified global competition and rapid technological
change that East Asia has undergone recently. Although the nations of the East Asian region
have not travelled parallel paths in terms of industrialization and many other respects, the
region’s economic interdependence is rapidly progressing with the common challenges posed by
the pressures of globalization. In preparing for the Seoul conference, the Korean Sociological
Association (KSA) was our collaborative partner providing essential help and contacts. We
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Wolf Schäfer & Gert Schmidt