

Getting Asia Wrong

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The Need for New Analytical Frameworks

Most international relations theory is inductively derived from the European experience of the past four centuries, during which Europe was the locus and generator of war, innovation, and wealth. According to Kenneth Waltz, "The theory of international politics is written in terms of the great powers of an era. It would be . . . ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics based on Malaysia and Costa Rica. . . . A general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers."¹ If international relations theorists paid attention to other regions of the globe, it was to study subjects considered peripheral such as third world security or the behavior of small states.² Accordingly, international relations scholarship has focused on explaining the European experience, including, for example, the causes of World Wars I and II, as well as the Cold War and U.S.-Soviet relations.³ Although this is still true, other parts of the world have become increasingly significant. Accordingly, knowledge of European

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1. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 73. Another classic work uses Europe's past as a guide to Asia's future. See Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 5–33.

2. See, for example, Stephen D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict: The Third World against Global Liberalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Edward Azar and Chung-in Moon, *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats* (Aldershot, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1988); Caroline Thomas, *In Search of Security: The Third World in International Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1987); and Mohammed Ayooob, ed., *Regional Security in the Third World: Case Studies from Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986).

3. Classic works in international relations include E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1951); and Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973). For discussion about the field, see Jack Snyder, "Richness, Rigor, and Relevance in the Study of Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Winter 1984/85), pp. 89–108; Samuel S. Kim, "Introduction," in Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), pp. 1–18; and James N. Rosenau, "Toward Single-Country Theories of Foreign Policy: The Case of the USSR," in Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley Jr., and Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 53–73.

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relations is no longer sufficient for a well-trained international relations generalist.

During this time Asia itself—sometimes defined as including China, India, Japan, and Russia and comprising perhaps half the world’s population—had an occasional impact on the great powers, but it was never a primary focus. In the past two decades, however, Asia has emerged as a region whose economic, military, and diplomatic power has begun to rival and perhaps even exceed that of Europe. Its growing influence gives scholars a wonderful opportunity in the fields of international relations generally and Asian security specifically to produce increasingly rigorous and theoretically sophisticated work. Because Europe was so important for so long a period, in seeking to understand international relations, scholars have often simply deployed concepts, theories, and experiences derived from the European experience to project onto and explain Asia. This approach is problematic at best. Eurocentric ideas have yielded several mistaken conclusions and predictions about conflict and alignment behavior in Asia. For example, since the early 1990s many Western analysts have predicted dire scenarios for Asia, whereas many Asian experts have expressed growing optimism about the region’s future.⁴ It is an open question whether Asia, with its very different political economy, history, culture, and demographics, will ever function like the European state system. This is not to criticize European-derived theories purely because they are based on the Western experience: The origins of a theory are not necessarily relevant to its applicability. Rather these theories do a poor job as they are applied to Asia; what I seek to show in this article is that more careful attention to their application can strengthen the theories themselves.

In this article I make two claims about the levels of conflict and types of alignment behavior in Asia. First, I argue that the pessimistic predictions of Western scholars after the end of the Cold War that Asia would experience a period of increased arms racing and power politics has largely failed to materialize, a reality that scholars must confront if they are to develop a better understanding of Asian relations. Second, contrary to the expectations of standard formulations of realism, and although U.S. power confounds the issue, Asian states do not appear to be balancing against rising powers such as China. Rather they seem to be bandwagoning.

4. For optimistic views of Asia in the early 1990s, see Frank B. Gibney, *The Pacific Century: America and Asia in a Changing World* (New York: Scribner, 1992); World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1993); and Paul Dibb, David Hale, and Peter Prince, “The Strategic Implications of Asia’s Economic Crisis,” *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 5–26.

I make these claims with great care. Asia is empirically rich and, in many ways, different from the West. Thus efforts to explain Asian issues using international relations theories largely derived inductively from the European experience can be problematic. Focusing exclusively on Asia's differences, however, runs the risk of essentializing the region, resulting in the sort of orientalist analysis that most scholars have correctly avoided.⁵ I am not making a plea for research that includes a touch of realism, a dash of constructivism, and a pinch of liberalism.⁶ The same social-scientific standards—falsifiability, generalizability, and clear causal logic—should apply in the study of Asian international relations as has been applied to the study of Europe. To achieve this, scholars must not dismiss evidence that does not fit their theories. Instead they must consider such evidence and sharpen their propositions so that they may be falsified.

Many of the criticisms that I make in this article could apply to other international relations theories such as liberalism or constructivism. I have chosen to focus on realist approaches because of their wide use in Western scholarship on Asia. In addition, determining which predictions emerge from which variant of realist theory is often the subject of heated debate; in particular, efforts to single out predictions that apply to Asia can be extremely frustrating.⁷

I have three caveats: First, I am not claiming a priori that difference will triumph over similarity. Whether Asian and Western international relations are different is an open question, and in many cases scholars may conclude that there are no significant differences. Instead of ignoring or dismissing potential differences as unimportant, however, scholars should ask: Is this situation different? And if so, why? Such questions are likely to yield useful answers not only for scholars of international relations but also for those specializing in either security or Asian studies.

Second, scholarship on Asian international relations from all perspectives is increasingly theoretically rich and empirically sophisticated. Research from the realist and liberal schools has explored issues such as U.S.-China and U.S.-Japan relations, as well as the changing dynamics of the Japan-South

5. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); and A.L. Macfie, ed., *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

6. An excellent discussion of new research is found in Peter J. Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara, "Japan, Asian-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytic Eclecticism," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2002), pp. 153–185.

7. See Stephen G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization*, Vol. 51 No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 445–477.

Korea-U.S. alliance.⁸ Literature with a cultural or constructivist perspective has addressed topics including the formation of identity, prostitution and its relationship to U.S. overseas troop deployments, and antimilitarist sentiment in Japan.⁹ More historically oriented work has emerged that challenges all of the prevailing paradigms.¹⁰ Despite these encouraging trends, such work remains the exception rather than the norm.

Finally, the concept of “Asia” lends itself to highly problematic and often sweeping generalizations. The term “Asia” often refers to a geographic area that takes in Russia and Japan, encompasses the entire Pacific Ocean including Australia, and ranges as far west as India and Pakistan. These countries have different cultures, histories, political institutions, economies, geographic features, and climates. Accordingly, wherever possible I refer either to individual countries, to Northeast Asia (comprising Japan, China, the Korean Peninsula, and occasionally Russia), or to Southeast Asia (whose principal countries include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). This article does not cover South Asia (principally the countries of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). When I do refer to Asia as a whole, it is mainly to differentiate it from “the West.”¹¹

8. See Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–58* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Leonard J. Schoppa, *Bargaining with Japan: What American Pressure Can and Cannot Do* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Richard Samuels, *“Rich Nation, Strong Army”: National Security and Technological Transformation in Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

9. See Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Anti-Militarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Chalmers A. Johnson, “The State and Japanese Grand Strategy,” in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

10. See Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); and Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948–72* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

11. See Alexander Woodside, “The Asia-Pacific Idea as a Mobilization Myth,” in Arif Dirlik, ed., *What’s in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), pp. 13–28; Gil Rozman, “Flawed Regionalism: Reconceptualizing Northeast Asia in the 1990s,” *Pacific Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1998), pp. 1–27; and Michael Ng-Quinn, “The International-

This article is composed of three major sections. In the first section, I explain why the pessimistic predictions of the 1990s about a return of power politics to Asia have not materialized and why scholarship needs to acknowledge this fact. In the second section, I argue that the Chinese experience of the past two decades poses a challenge to realist theories. The third section argues that Asian countries balance differently from countries in the West. I conclude by discussing the tension between area studies and political science theorizing in the field of comparative politics. I argue that this tension is healthy because it forces both sides of the debate to sharpen their scholarship. The field of international relations can benefit from such a discussion, as well. Elevating the Asian experience to a central place in the study of international relations will provide an excellent opportunity to inject vitality into the stale paradigm wars that currently characterize the field.

Post-Cold War Pessimism over Asia

Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, some scholars in the West began to predict that Asia was “ripe for rivalry.”¹² They based this prediction on the following factors: wide disparities in the levels of economic and military power among nations in the region; their different political systems, ranging from democratic to totalitarian; historical animosities; and the lack of international institutions. Many scholars thus envisaged a return of power politics after decades when conflict in Asia was dominated by the Cold War tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. In addition, scholars envisaged a return of arms racing and the possibility of major conflict among Asian coun-

alization of the Region: The Case of Northeast Asian International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 1986), pp. 107–125.

12. For generally pessimistic perspectives, see Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry”; Richard K. Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), p. 60; Robert A. Manning and James Przystup, “Asia’s Transition Diplomacy: Hedging against Futureshock,” *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 43–67; Avery Goldstein, “Great Expectations: Interpreting China’s Arrival,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 36–73; Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, “Rethinking East Asian Security,” *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 3–21; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51; Thomas J. Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up: China’s Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5–40; Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 56, 65; and Charles A. Kupchan, “After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of Stable Multipolarity,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 40–79.

tries, almost all of which had rapidly changing internal and external environments. More specific predictions included the growing possibility of Japanese rearmament;¹³ increased Chinese adventurism spurred by China's rising power and ostensibly revisionist intentions;¹⁴ conflict or war over the status of Taiwan;¹⁵ terrorist or missile attacks from a rogue North Korea against South Korea, Japan, or even the United States;¹⁶ and arms racing or even conflict in Southeast Asia, prompted in part by unresolved territorial disputes.¹⁷

13. On Japan, see Gerald Segal, "The Coming Confrontation between China and Japan," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 1993), pp. 27–32; Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Clyde Prestowitz Jr., *Trading Places: How We Allowed Japan to Take the Lead* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); Eamonn Fingleton, *Blindside: Why Japan Is Still on Track to Overtake the U.S. by the Year 2000* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994); Chalmers A. Johnson, "Japan in Search of a 'Normal' Role," *Daedalus*, Vol. 121 (Fall 1992), pp. 1–33; Reinhard Drifte, *Japan's Foreign Policy for the Twenty-first Century: From Economic Superpower to What Power?* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998); and George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991). For an example of the worry that Japan's economy induced in policymaking circles, see Central Intelligence Agency, *Japan, 2000* (Rochester, N.Y.: Rochester Institute of Technology, 1991); and "Paradigm Paranoia," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 27, 1991, p. 15.

14. On the China threat, see Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'Constraintment' of China," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107–135; Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 149–168, at p. 164; Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Rise of China," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (November/December 1993), pp. 59–74; and Edward Friedman and Barrett L. McCormick, eds., *What If China Doesn't Democratize? Implications for War and Peace* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

15. See Christopher W. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Shelley Rigger, "Competing Conceptions of Taiwan's Identity," in Suisheng Zhao, ed., *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and the 1995–1996 Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999); and John Franklin Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990).

16. See Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability," p. 66; Aaron Friedberg, "Loose Cannon," *New York Times Review of Books*, December 12, 1999, p. 23; Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Most Dangerous Country," *National Interest*, Vol. 57 (Fall 1999), pp. 45–54; Fred C. Iklé, "U.S. Folly May Start Another Korean War," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1998, p. A18; Amos A. Jordan, "Coping with North Korea," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 33–46; "Sound the Alarm: Defector Says North Korea Is Preparing for War," *Economist*, April 26, 1997, p. 34; and Gen. Patrick Hughes, director, U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, statement before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Global Threats and Challenges to the United States and Its Interests Abroad," February 5, 1997, 102d Cong., 1st sess., http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1997_hr/s970205d.htm. For counterarguments, see David C. Kang, "North Korea: Deterrence through Danger," in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 234–263; David C. Kang, "Preventive War and North Korea," *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 330–363; Denny Roy, "North Korea and the Madman Theory," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 307–316; and Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

17. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana," pp. 44–45.

More than a dozen years have passed since the end of the Cold War, yet none of these pessimistic predictions have come to pass. Indeed there has not been a major war in Asia since the 1978–79 Vietnam-Cambodia-China conflict; and with only a few exceptions (North Korea and Taiwan), Asian countries do not fear for their survival. Japan, though powerful, has not rearmed to the extent it could. China seems no more revisionist or adventurous now than it was before the end of the Cold War. And no Asian country appears to be balancing against China. In contrast to the period 1950–80, the past two decades have witnessed enduring regional stability and minimal conflict. Scholars should directly confront these anomalies, rather than dismissing them.

Social scientists can learn as much from events that do not occur as from those that do. The case of Asian security provides an opportunity to examine the usefulness of accepted international relations paradigms and to determine how the assumptions underlying these theories can become misspecified. Some scholars have smuggled ancillary and ad hoc hypotheses about preferences into realist, institutionalist, and constructivist theories to make them fit various aspects of the Asian cases, including: assumptions about an irrational North Korean leadership, predictions of an expansionist and revisionist China, and depictions of Japanese foreign policy as “abnormal.”¹⁸ Social science moves forward from the clear statement of a theory, its causal logic, and its predictions. Just as important, however, is the rigorous assessment of the theory, especially if predictions flowing from it fail to materialize. Exploring why scholars have misunderstood Asia is both a fruitful and a necessary theoretical exercise.

Two major problems exist with many of the pessimistic predictions about Asia. First, when confronted with the nonbalancing of Asian states against China, the lack of Japanese rearmament, and five decades of noninvasion by North Korea, scholars typically respond: Just wait. This reply, however, is intellectually ambiguous. Although it would be unfair to expect instantaneous national responses to changing international conditions, a dozen years would seem to be long enough to detect at least some change. Indeed Asian nations have historically shown an ability to respond quickly to changing circumstances. The Meiji restoration in Japan in 1868 was a remarkable example of governmental response to European and American encroachment, and by 1874

18. For a detailed discussion of these criticisms that uses North Korea as an example, see David C. Kang, “International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (September 2003).

Japan had emerged from centuries of isolation to occupy Taiwan.¹⁹ More recently, with the introduction of market reforms in late 1978, when Deng Xiaoping famously declared, "To get rich is glorious," the Chinese have transformed themselves from diehard socialists to exuberant capitalists beginning less than three years after Mao's death in 1976.²⁰ In the absence of a specific time frame, the "just wait" response is unfalsifiable. Providing a causal logic that explains how and when scholars can expect changes is an important aspect of this response, and reasonable scholars will accept that change may not be immediate but may occur over time. Without such a time frame, however, the "just wait" response is mere rhetorical wordplay designed to avoid troubling evidence.

A more rigorous response in the Chinese case would be to argue that conditions of balancing, not timing per se, are the critical factor. In this view, China's relatively slow military modernization and limited power projection capabilities suggest that its potential threat to other Asian countries is growing only slowly; thus the conditions necessary to produce costly all-out balancing efforts do not yet exist. Moreover, even though many of the conditions that theorists argue can lead to conflict do already exist in East Asia, the region has so far avoided both major and minor interstate conflict. Most significant, in less than two decades China has evolved from being a moribund and closed middle power to the most dynamic country in the region, with an economy that not only will soon surpass Japan's (if it has not already) but also shows many signs of continuing growth. This dramatic power transition has evoked hardly any response from China's neighbors.²¹ By realist standards, China should be provoking balancing behavior, merely because its overall size and projected rate of growth are so high.

19. On the Meiji restoration, see E. Herbert Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Period* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1973); and Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

20. See Andrew G. Walder, ed., *China's Transitional Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Jean Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

21. Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, "Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 1996), pp. 235-260; Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (October 1987), pp. 82-107; Randall L. Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?" *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (January 1992), pp. 235-269; Woosang Kim and James D. Morrow, "When Do Power Shifts Lead to War?" *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (November 1992), pp. 896-922; and Henk W. Houweling and Jan G. Siccama, "Power Transitions as a Cause of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (March 1988), pp. 87-102.

Second, pessimistic predictions about Asia's future often suffer from incompletely specified evidentiary standards. Scholars will frequently select evidence that supports their arguments and dismiss contradictory evidence as epiphenomenal. For example, in his most recent book, John Mearsheimer argues that although Japan (and Germany) have "the potential in terms of population and wealth to become great powers . . . they depend on the United States for their security, and are effectively *semi-sovereign states*, not great powers."²² This begs a number of questions: For instance, why define Japan, which has the second largest economy in the world, as "semi-sovereign"? Indeed why would such an economically advanced state ever allow itself to remain "semi-sovereign"? Mearsheimer's book is focused on building a theory of offensive realism, but the logic of offensive realism would lead to the conclusion that Japan should have rearmed long ago. The onus is on those predicting an increase in power politics in Asia to state clearly what evidence would falsify their arguments or challenge their assumptions, not to explain away objections or ignore contradictory evidence. A clearer explication of their hypotheses and the refutable propositions would be a genuine contribution to the field.

More than a dozen years after the end of the Cold War, much of Asia bears little resemblance to the picture painted by the pessimists. Although the years 1950–80 saw numerous armed conflicts, since then there has been no major interstate war in either Northeast or Southeast Asia. Countries do not fear for their survival in either area. In Northeast Asia, rivalry and power politics remain muted. Japan has not rearmed, China shows little sign of having revisionist tendencies, and North Korea has neither imploded nor exploded. Southeast Asia, as well, remains free of the kinds of arms races and power politics that some have expected. As Muthiah Alagappa writes, "Viewed through the ahistorical realist lens, the contemporary security challenges could indeed suggest that Asia is a dangerous place. But a comprehensive historical view would suggest otherwise. Although Asia still faces serious internal and international challenges, there are fewer challenges than before and most of the region's disputes and conflicts have stabilized."²³ The field of international relations would be better served if the pessimists not only admitted this reality but also asked why this might be the case. Because China has such an impor-

22. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 382 (emphasis added).

23. Muthiah Alagappa, "Introduction: Predictability and Stability Despite Challenges," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, p. 11.

tant influence on Northeast, Southeast, and even South Asia, I offer the tentative outline of such an explanation in the following section.

China, Hierarchy, and Balancing

The most hotly debated of the pessimistic predictions about Asia concerns the rise of a revisionist China. After two decades of rapid economic growth, China appears poised to become a great power once again. Thus for Richard Betts, the question becomes: "Should we want China to get rich or not? For realists, the answer should be no, since a rich China would overturn any balance of power."²⁴ Concern over a revisionist and destabilizing China has only increased in the past decade, as its economy continues to grow and its military and technological capabilities further expand.²⁵

Yet concern over a strong China may be misplaced. Historically, it has been Chinese weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved. East Asian regional relations have historically been hierarchic, more peaceful, and more stable than those in the West.²⁶ Until the intrusion of the Western powers in the nineteenth century, East Asian interstate relations were remarkably stable, punctuated only occasionally by

24. Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability," p. 55. For similar arguments, see Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon?"; Andrew Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); Goldstein, "Great Expectations"; and the citations in note 16.

25. For excellent attempts to measure Chinese economic growth, see Harry X. Wu, *How Rich Is China and How Fast Has the Economy Grown? Statistical Controversies*, China Economy Papers (Canberra: Asia Pacific School of Economics and Management, Australian National University, 1998); and Lawrence Lau, "The Chinese Economy: Past, Present, and Future," Stanford University, 2000.

26. For detailed discussion on hierarchy in Asian international relations, see David C. Kang, "Hierarchy in Asian International Relations: 1400–2000," Dartmouth College, 2002; and Muthiah Alagappa, "International Politics in Asia: The Historical Context," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Practice*, pp. 65–114. The classic statement is John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). See also Michel Oksenberg, "The Issue of Sovereignty in the Asian Historical Context," in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *Problematic Sovereignty: Contest Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American–East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1967); and Johnston, *Cultural Realism*. For complementary work, see Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); and Victor D. Cha's discussion in "Defining Security in East Asia: History, Hotspots, and Horizon-gazing," in Eun Mee Kim, ed., *The Four Asian Tigers: Economic Development and the Global Political Economy* (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 1998), pp. 33–60.

conflict between countries. The system was based on Chinese military and economic power but was reinforced through centuries of cultural exchange, and the units in the system were sovereign states that had political control over recognized geographic areas. East Asian international relations emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable informal equality. With China as the dominant state and surrounding countries as peripheral or secondary states, as long as hierarchy was observed there was little need for interstate war. This contrasts sharply with the Western tradition of international relations, which has consisted of formal equality between nation-states, informal hierarchy, and near-constant interstate conflict.²⁷

In the nineteenth century, the traditional East Asian order was demolished as both Western and Asian powers (in particular, Japan) scrambled to establish influence in the region. After a century of tumult in Asia, the late 1990s saw the reemergence of a strong and confident China, the growing stabilization of Vietnam, and increasingly consolidated political rule around the region. Although realists and liberals have tended to view modern East Asia as potentially unstable, if the system is experiencing a return to a pattern of hierarchy, the result may be increased stability.

China in 2003 appears to be reemerging as the gravitational center of East Asia. From a historical perspective, a rich and strong China could again cement regional stability. However, a century of chaos and change, and the growing influence of the rest of the world (in particular the United States), would lead one to conclude that a Chinese-led regional system would not look like its historical predecessor. Indeed Chung-in Moon argues that the Westphalian notion of sovereignty holds sway in Asia, although he also admits that this is frequently compromised and often contested.²⁸

Even if a hierarchic system does not reemerge in East Asia, and even if countries in the region do not adopt Westphalian norms in their entirety, the ques-

27. For more on the concept of hierarchy in its various forms, see William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), p. 13; David Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Winter 1996), pp. 1–33; Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, "Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 689–721; and Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

28. Chung-in Moon, "Sovereignty: Dominance of the Westphalian Concept and Implications for Regional Security," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 424–457. Jean-Marc Blanchard calls Asian states "adolescent." Blanchard, "Maritime Issues in Asia: The Problem of Adolescence," in *ibid.*, pp. 424–457.

tion of whether a more powerful China will be a revisionist or a status quo state remains.²⁹ Although the evidence is mixed, much in China's behavior points to Beijing's desire to stabilize the region. According to political scientist Xinbo Wu, "Both the political leadership and the Chinese public believe that . . . China must regain major-power status."³⁰ Wu also notes that China perceives the international environment in the past decade as less hostile, and even benign. At the same time, Beijing views its relationship with Washington as potentially the most troubling, believing that the United States is the primary constraint on Chinese maneuvering and influence in the region.³¹ It is not clear, however, if China intends to challenge the United States for regional supremacy. For three decades, China has made a conscious decision to confine itself to a relatively modest second-strike nuclear force, although this could change depending on U.S. actions regarding missile defense.³²

Does China have territorial or ideological ambitions? The evidence so far suggests that although China has outstanding territorial disputes with a number of countries, it has neither revisionist nor imperial aims. First, China has shown a genuine desire to join the world community, perhaps best reflected in its considerable efforts to become a member of the World Trade Organization. Wu notes that "the PRC understands that the best way to defend its interest is to make its own voice heard in the rule-making process,"³³ by joining influential regional and international institutions. This explains Chinese active participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Regional Forum, and a number of other international institutions.³⁴

29. See Alastair Iain Johnston, "Beijing's Security Behavior in the Asia-Pacific: Is China a Dissatisfied Power?" paper prepared for Asian Security Workshop, Cornell University, March 29–30, 2002.

30. Xinbo Wu, "China: Security Practice of a Modernizing and Ascending Power," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Practice*, p. 115. For extended discussion, see Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999).

31. Wu, "China," p. 148.

32. On the controversy over theater and national missile defenses, see Kori Urayama, "Chinese Perspectives on Theater Missile Defense: Policy Implications for Japan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (July/August 2000), pp. 599–621; and Thomas J. Christensen, "Theater Missile Defense and Taiwan's Security," *Orbis*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 18–32; and Bates Gill and Michael O'Hanlon, "China's Hollow Military," *National Interest*, Vol. 56 (Summer 1999), pp. 55–62.

33. Wu, "China," p. 151.

34. On multilateral institutions in Asia, see Amitav Acharya, "Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 210–240; and Margaret M. Pearson, "The Major Multilateral Economic Institutions Engage China," in Johnston and Ross, *Engaging China*, pp. 207–234.

Second, in the past two decades China has resolved territorial disputes with Afghanistan, Burma, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Russia. More recently, it has resolved its disputes with Cambodia and Vietnam, renouncing support from the Khmer Rouge and embracing the Paris Peace Accords of 1991 that brought elections to Cambodia, and normalizing relations and delineating its border with Vietnam.³⁵ Jianwei Wang writes that “the fact that no war for territory has been fought in East Asia since the 1980s indicates a tendency to seek peaceful settlement of the remaining disputes.”³⁶ On maritime disputes, Jean-Marc Blanchard notes that all Asian countries except Cambodia, North Korea, and Thailand have signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which has provided an institutional forum for parties to address disputes over fishing rights, trade routes, and other matters.³⁷

China does have unresolved territorial disputes over Taiwan, with ASEAN over the Spratly Islands, and with Japan over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands.³⁸ Many other Asian nations also have unresolved territorial issues, resulting from a century of regional change, not from Chinese revisionism. For example, Japan and Russia have yet to resolve their dispute over the Northern territories, nor have Japan and Korea resolved their dispute over Tokto Island. Thus these territorial disputes by themselves are not an indicator of Chinese ambitions.

Countries in East Asia are also deciding how to deal with China’s growing economy. Japanese investment in China continues to expand, and Japanese companies are increasingly seeing their fortunes tied to the Chinese market. Japan runs a \$27 billion trade deficit with China.³⁹ Forty thousand Taiwanese companies have investments in the mainland, employing 10 million people. The Taiwanese central bank estimates that total mainland investment is be-

35. On the Paris Peace Accords, see S.J. Hood, “Beijing’s Cambodia Gamble and the Prospects for Peace in Indochina: The Khmer Rouge or Sihanouk?” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 10 (October 1990), pp. 977–991.

36. Jianwei Wang, “Territorial Disputes and Asian Conflict: Sources, Management, and Prospects,” in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 380–423, at p. 383.

37. Blanchard, “Maritime Issues in Asia,” pp. 424–457.

38. On the Spratlys, see Michael Gallagher, “China’s Illusory Threat to the South China Sea,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 169–194; Ian Storey, “Creeping Assertiveness: China, the Philippines, and the South China Sea Dispute,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April 1999), pp. 95–118; and Mark Valencia, *China and the South China Sea Disputes*, Adelphi Papers No. 298 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 1995).

39. See David Kruger and Ichiko Fuyuno, “Innovate or Die: Reinventing Japan,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 25, 2002, pp. 28–34.

tween \$40 and \$50 billion.⁴⁰ Sixty percent of Taiwanese foreign direct investment went to China in 2001, despite rising political tensions. The capitalization of China's stock market is the largest in Asia except for Japan's, despite being just a decade old—larger than the capitalization of stock markets in Brazil, Hong Kong, India, Mexico, South Korea, or Taiwan.⁴¹

The growing importance of China's economy in some ways parallels China's historical role. Historical precedents may not be tremendously helpful, however, in assessing whether hierarchy will reemerge in Asia, because other Asian nations' willingness to accept subordinate positions in a Sino-centric hierarchy will depend on beliefs about how a dominant China would behave in the future. Additionally, it is not clear if China is willing to make more adjustments to calm fears or further integrate into the globalized world. This possibility deserves serious investigation, however, and it could be a fruitful line of research. Because the evidence of Chinese revisionism over the past decade of rapid growth is limited at best, scholars should explore the possibility that China will be a stabilizing force in Northeast and Southeast Asia. One way in which East Asian relations may manifest themselves differently than realists expect concerns the issue of whether other nations in the region fear China's growing power and will seek to balance against it, or whether those nations will instead choose to bandwagon with it.

Balancing versus Bandwagoning and the Role of the United States

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, Northeast and Southeast Asian nations are not obviously balancing against China. Relying on variations of "mercantile realism," "soft balancing," and "reluctant realism,"⁴² however, scholars contend that this is likely to change in the future. Yet any argument that balancing may occur in Asia or that balancing has a different meaning in Asia is an admission that such countries are not acting as balance of power realists ex-

40. There is also considerable nonapproved Taiwanese investment, meaning that the actual figures are higher. See David Murphy and Maureen Pao, "A Place to Call Home," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 5, 2001, p. 56.

41. Tom Holland, "Between Hype and a Hard Place," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 28, 2001, p. 40.

42. See Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 171–203; Yuen Foong Khong, "Southeast Asia's Post-Cold War Security Strategy: Institutions and Soft Balancing in the Wake of Strategic Uncertainty," paper prepared for Asian Security Workshop, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, March 29–30, 2002; and Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

pect. Although the issue of balancing is complicated by the presence of U.S. diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military power in Asia, it is still possible to make tentative assessments about the region. Instead of assuming that Asia will balance rising Chinese power, posing this as a question would be a more productive exercise.⁴³

Hierarchy can be global as well as regional, and the United States is clearly the dominant state both in the international order and in Asia. This has important implications for scholarly understanding of the region. As China continues on the path of economic growth and military modernization, the key question is whether the United States can or will allow China to resume its place atop the Asian regional hierarchy. As this section shows, the answer to this question is not obvious. It is difficult to predict the reaction of other Asian nations to the possibility of increased U.S.-Chinese confrontation as a result of continued Chinese economic and military growth. If, as realists expect, Asian nations do not balance against China, a U.S. attempt to form a balancing coalition with East Asian states to contain China could be highly problematic. In addition, if the United States withdraws significantly from the region, Asia may not become the dangerous or unstable region that balance of power adherents would suggest, because other nations may acquiesce to China's central position in Asia.⁴⁴

Discerning balancing behavior in Asia is especially difficult given the overwhelming dominance of U.S. power in the region. As argued by Michael Mastanduno and others, the conventional view is that by balancing China, the United States acts as a stabilizing force in the region. According to Mastanduno, "American power and presence have helped to keep traditional power rivals in the region from engaging in significant conflict and have reassured smaller states who have traditionally been vulnerable to major regional wars."⁴⁵ The U.S. alliance system in Northeast and Southeast Asia, as well as

43. On bandwagoning, see Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72–107.

44. For an argument that U.S. power projection is misguided, see Chalmers A. Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000). There is currently no indication that the United States will withdraw military assets from Korea or Japan. Such steps have been discussed, however, since the Jimmy Carter administration in the 1970s. For current U.S. planning, see Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision, 2020* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 2000).

45. Michael Mastanduno, "Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 141–170, at p. 143. See also Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 81–118.

the provision of naval facilities to the United States by Singapore and the Philippines, are manifestations of this balancing behavior. The implication is that there would be considerably more conflict in the region were the United States to pull back or otherwise reduce its military presence.⁴⁶

The ability of the United States to maintain regional peace and stability, however, especially in Northeast Asia, is an open question. As Alagappa notes, "The claim that stability in Northeast Asia is predicated on the U.S. role rests on several controversial assertions . . . that the United States checks China's growing power and influence, which is feared by other Asian states; [and] that nearly all countries trust and prefer the United States. . . . [However,] containment of China does not appeal to many Asian states."⁴⁷ Although the United States still retains overwhelming power in the region, its scope is considerably smaller than it was at its height a quarter century ago. In addition, both East Asian and Southeast Asian countries have grown significantly stronger, richer, and generally more stable. This transition at least requires an explanation. That the United States plays an important security role in Asia is relatively uncontroversial. Whether some type of U.S. withdrawal would be deleterious for the region is far more questionable.

Mastanduno writes that U.S. hegemony in Asia is incomplete in many respects and functions more as a "holding operation."⁴⁸ And although Avery Goldstein argues that balancing does occur in Asia, he too suggests that its contribution to regional security is less clear.⁴⁹ The distribution of power and potential for conflict do not lead to obvious bipolarity or multipolarity.⁵⁰ Part of what makes understanding Asia so difficult is this complexity. Indeed some scholars have argued that underlying the core U.S. strategy is the belief that China's future behavior can be changed in a positive direction, through either democratization or integration into the global economy (or some combination of both), and that engagement is a policy tool toward that end.⁵¹

46. Christensen, "Theater Missile Defense and Taiwan's Security"; and Kupchan, "After Pax Americana," pp. 40–55.

47. Alagappa, "Managing Asian Security," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 571–606, at p. 601.

48. Mastanduno, "Incomplete Hegemony." On U.S. supremacy, see Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 13.

49. Avery Goldstein, "Balance of Power Politics: Consequences for Asian Security Order," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 171–209.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Mastanduno, "Incomplete Hegemony."

REALISM'S JAPAN PROBLEM

Japan's foreign policy provides perhaps the strongest evidence to date that balancing is not occurring in Asia as realist theories would predict. For the past twenty years, realists have consistently predicted that Japan would rearm, or at least become increasingly assertive in parallel with its growing economic power, but it has not. Although Japan is very powerful, it has not yet adopted the trappings of a great power. In contrast to realists who argue that power considerations will ultimately influence Japanese foreign policy, and in contrast to constructivists who argue that Japan's culture or domestic politics explain its foreign policy,⁵² I offer another explanation.

Scholars have spent decades speculating about whether and when Japan might become a "normal" power.⁵³ This is the wrong question. Arguments about whether Japan is "normal" or "militant" essentialize the country and miss the point. Japan invaded other Asian states a century ago because the system in Asia was highly unstable and Japan sought to protect itself. In the current era, Japan has little to gain from challenging either a strong China or the United States, but much to lose by starting great power competition. Geography, population, and economics mean not only that Japan benefits from a strong international order, but also that it is relatively safe from military threats.

There are two major realist explanations for Japan's foreign policy behavior, both of which are often conflated in the literature. The first is the great power explanation, which holds that Japan is so rich and technologically advanced that it will soon want to become a great power once again (this is the "power maximization" hypothesis). Second is the umbrella (or "power satisfaction") explanation: According to this hypothesis, when U.S. forces withdraw from Japan, it will rearm and become a normal power.⁵⁴

52. See, for example, Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security*; Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 119–150; and Heginbotham and Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy."

53. Johnson, "Japan in Search of a 'Normal' Role"; and Drafte, *Japan's Foreign Policy for the Twenty-first Century*.

54. For arguments that Japan will soon become a great power, see Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," pp. 56, 65; Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability," p. 55; and Michael C. Desch, "Correspondence: Isms and Schisms—Culturalism versus Realism in Security Studies," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), p. 176. On the U.S. security umbrella restraining Japanese rearmament, see Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability," p. 56; and Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry," p. 25. For counterarguments, see the extended discussion in Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms*

These explanations are mutually incompatible: Japan cannot be a normal great power and yet be protected by the U.S. security umbrella. Of the two, the power maximization hypothesis is most easily falsified. Realists have no explanation for why Japan, the world's second-largest economy, has not sought to balance or challenge the United States (the world's largest power) or why Japan has not attempted to provide for its own security. As Waltz has written, "Countries with great power economics have become great military powers, whether or not reluctantly."⁵⁵ In addition to having the world's second largest economy, Japan is arguably the world's finest manufacturing nation and one of its most technologically sophisticated. Yet not only does Japan lack aircraft carriers, intercontinental missiles, and nuclear weapons, but it does not send troops abroad. In sum, Japan is hard to invade, but it also evinces almost no significant military or diplomatic strength. So although Japan is relatively strong, it has not rearmed to the extent it could, nor has it rearmed to the extent that a "great power" would (see Table 1).

In support of the great power explanation, Michael Desch offers evidence of Japanese supposed intentions: marginally increased defense spending, pursuit of a virtual nuclear deterrent, and growing nationalistic rhetoric from selected politicians.⁵⁶ Yet this evidence is speculative at best. The key is not the offhand remark of a right-wing politician, but rather that Japan could easily triple its defense budget and still spend only what other powers such as France and Germany do (Figure 1). In addition, Japan could modify its constitution, develop a nuclear arsenal, deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles, and build aircraft carriers. It could also forge a foreign policy independent from that of the United States and attempt to exert far more influence in diplomatic arenas. This would be convincing evidence that Japan is, or aspires to be, a great power. Discussion of Japan as a virtual, potential, or nascent power is simply an admission that Japan does not function as a typical realist nation-state.

and National Security; Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan: Normative Constraints versus Structural Imperatives," in Alagappa, *Asian Security Practice*, p. 203; Chalmers A. Johnson, "History Restarted: Japanese-American Relations at the End of the Century," in Richard Higgott, Richard Leaver, and John Ravenhill, eds., *Pacific Economic Relations in the 1990s: Cooperation or Conflict?* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993); Jennifer M. Lind, "Correspondence: Spirals, Security, and Stability in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), pp. 190–195; and Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum."

55. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Relations," p. 66.

56. Desch, "Correspondence: Isms and Schisms—Culturalism versus Realism in Security Studies," p. 177.

Table 1. Japan and Evidence of Great Power Status.

Indicators of Great Power Aspirations or Potential	Japan's Status
Modifications of the constitution to allow the use of force	No
Nuclear weapons	No
Aircraft carriers	No
Power projection capabilities	No
Intercontinental missiles	No
Defense spending on par with great powers	No
Military procurement strategies	No
Attempts to influence the "great game" (e.g., a seat on the UN Security Council)	No
Active regional leadership	No
Gross domestic product on par with great powers	Yes
Population on par with great powers	Yes
Per capita gross domestic product on par with great powers	Yes
Technological capability on par with great powers	Yes

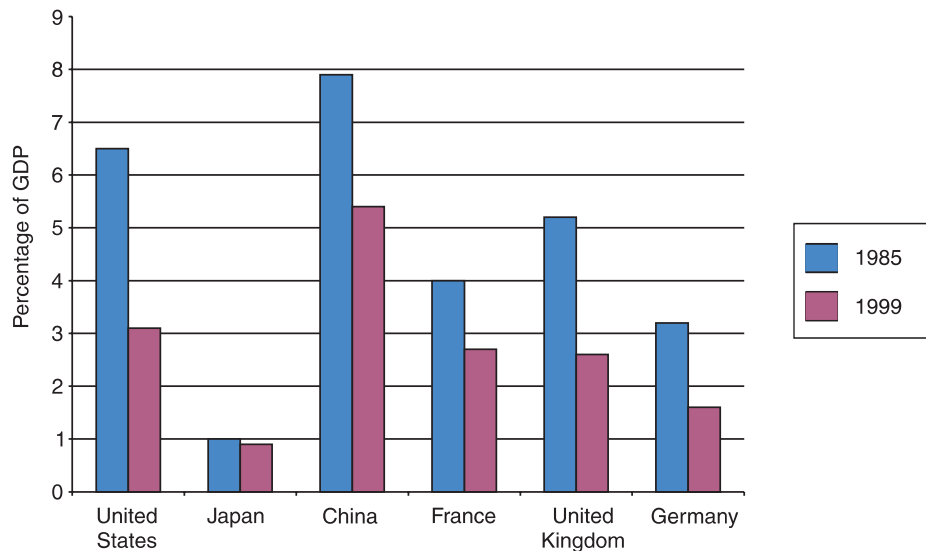
The U.S. umbrella explanation is also unconvincing, for at least two reasons. First, it does not explain why the second largest economic power in the international system would trust the world's only superpower to provide for its security. Threats arise through the mere existence of capabilities—intentions can always change for the worse.⁵⁷ As Robert Jervis writes, "Minds can be changed, new leaders can come to power, values can shift, new opportunities and dangers can arise."⁵⁸ A weak, peaceful country may alter its goals as it becomes stronger. Second, the umbrella explanation fails to account for why Japan did not doubt the U.S. commitment to its security in the past. Arguments about the U.S. umbrella implicitly assume that Japan is realist and would rearm if the United States departed the region. If this is true, and if there is no other factor that keeps Japanese foreign policy from becoming more assertive, then Japan should have rearmed at least a decade ago, when the Japanese economy was at its height and when Tokyo had many reasons to doubt the U.S. commitment to its defense.

A Japanese policymaker in 1985 might have concluded that, given the previous fifteen years or so of negative signals from Washington, the U.S. commitment to Japan was unlikely to endure. In 1969 President Richard Nixon had

57. Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion."

58. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), p. 105.

Figure 1. Great Powers' Defense Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 1985 and 1999.



SOURCE: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2000–2001* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002).

called for “Asia for Asians” and began a major drawdown of U.S. troops and commitments to the region.⁵⁹ By 1985 Japan had seen the United States abandon South Vietnam, withdraw recognition of Taiwan, and pull half of its troops out of South Korea. In the mid-1980s U.S. concern over Japanese trading and economic policies was at its peak. This concern manifested itself in intense U.S. pressure on Japan to alter some of its economic agreements, among them the 1985 Plaza Accords that attempted to devalue the yen relative to the dollar, and the 1988 Structural Impediments Initiative that sought to force changes in Japan’s domestic economic practices.⁶⁰ In addition, the United States had begun to pressure Japan over “burden sharing” and attempted to make the Japanese pay more for the U.S. troops already deployed. All these indicators

59. On the “Nixon shocks,” see C. Vanhollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (April 1980), pp. 339–361.

60. See Leonard J. Schoppa, “Two-Level Games and Bargaining Outcomes: Why Gaiatsu Succeeds in Japan in Some Cases but Not Others,” *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 353–386.

suggested that the United States would cease to be a reliable ally of Japan. In addition, Japanese economic growth was at its highest, national sentiment about Japan's future was increasingly optimistic, and Japan was by some measures a better technological and manufacturing country than the United States.

From a realist perspective, only the most naïve and myopic of leaders would focus solely on the present. Thus Japan has had ample reason to doubt the U.S. commitment to its defense. Yet in 1976 Tokyo pledged to keep defense spending at 1 percent of Japan's gross domestic product, which has essentially remained unchanged. In addition, Japanese leaders had little reaction to either the Vietnam or Taiwan pullouts by the United States. Further, in the mid-1980s there was no concomitant change in the policies of Japan's Self-Defense Forces.⁶¹ Japan did not rearm despite real tensions with the United States in the 1980s, nor did it make any major changes in its foreign policy.⁶²

There is a third alternative concerning Japan's foreign policy, which I refer to as the hierarchic explanation. According to this explanation, Japan is a status quo secondary power that has not rearmed to the level it could because it has no need to, and because it has no intention of challenging either China or the United States for dominance in Asia. Japan does not fear for its survival, and it accepts the centrality of China in regional politics. The historical animosities and lingering mistrust over Japan for its colonial aggression in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century are reasons sometimes cited for a fear of Japanese rearmament. In the late nineteenth century, Japan faced decaying and despotic Chinese and Korean monarchies, a significant regional power vacuum, and pressures from Western nations. Today the militaries of South Korea and China are well equipped, their economies are robust, and there is no threat of Western colonization. Thus it is unlikely that Japan needs or will seek to expand its diplomatic and military influence on the Asian landmass.

In addition to explaining the historical pattern of Japanese foreign policy, the hierarchic explanation generates a different set of questions about Japan's future. For example, could Japan tilt toward China? Could Japan see the United States as the real threat to its survival? If Washington were to pressure Tokyo to take sides in an increasingly acrimonious U.S.-China relationship, it is

61. For a detailed study of Japanese military expenditures, see Michael J. Green, *Arming Japan: Production, Alliance Politics, and the Postwar Search for Autonomy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

62. Glenn D. Hook, Julie Gilson, Christopher W. Hughes, and Hugo Dobson, *Japan's International Relations: Politics, Economics, and Security* (London: Routledge, 2001).

not clear that Japan would antagonize a geographically proximate power for the sake of a tenuous alliance with a distant power.⁶³ In fact, there is evidence that Japan does not view its relationship with the United States as purely positive. There is also increasing evidence that the Japanese do not fear a strong China as much as they do a strong United States. A May 1995 *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll found that 26.6 percent of Japanese identified the United States as a security threat to their country, whereas only 21.3 percent identified China as a threat.⁶⁴ In countering the assumption that Japan has no choice but to rely on the United States, former Prime Minister Yashuiro Nakasone has said that “a worm can turn.”⁶⁵ A more recent opinion poll by *Asahi Shimbun* in May 2001 found that 74 percent of the Japanese public opposed revision of article 9 of the constitution (which prohibits Japan from using force “as means of settling international disputes”).⁶⁶ And in a magazine article, politician Ozawa Ichiro, who makes no mention of China, does mention the need for multilateralism to protect Japan from “Anglo-Saxon principles.”⁶⁷

As to whether Japan could tilt toward China, Ted Galen Carpenter writes, “[U.S.] officials who assume that a more active Japan will be an obedient junior partner of the United States are in for an unpleasant surprise. Tokyo shows signs of not only being more active on the security front, but also of being more independent of the United States. Nowhere is that trend more evident than with respect to policy toward China.”⁶⁸ For example, Japan has made clear that it does not wish to be drawn into any conflict over the status of Taiwan. In fact, the United States cannot count on Japan to support or provide bases in the event of a China-Taiwan conflict.⁶⁹ Japanese cooperation with China is increas-

63. James Przystup, “China, Japan, and the United States,” in Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations), pp. 21–42.

64. Poll quoted by Paul Midford, July 27, 2001, on the Social Science Japan Forum discussion site: ssj-forum@iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp. This site has featured an ongoing discussion about whether Japan might find the United States or China a greater threat.

65. Quoted in Yoichi Funabashi, *Alliance Adrift* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), p. 435.

66. Howard W. French, “Top Bush Aide Urges Japan to Form In-Depth Ties with the U.S.,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2001, p. A10. See also “The Best Response to the U.S. on Missile Defense Is a Flat ‘No,’” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 11, 2001, <http://www.asahi.co.jp>. The poll was conducted on May 2, 2001.

67. Ozawa Ichiro, “Nihon-koku Kenpo Kaisei Shian” [Draft proposal to change the Japanese constitution], *Bungei-shunjuu*, September 1999, p. 100.

68. Ted Galen Carpenter, “Is Japan Tilting toward China?” *Japan Times*, June 9, 2001, p. 6, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion.htm>.

69. Martin Sieff, “Asia’s Allies Won’t Back Bush,” *United Press International*, April 26, 2001.

ing in other ways as well. Bilateral trade volume between Japan and China in 1997 amounted to \$570 billion, fifty-two times greater than in 1972. China is now Japan's second-largest trading partner, and Japan ranks as China's largest trading partner. Moreover, China is the largest recipient of Japanese investment in Asia.⁷⁰

Japan is neither normal nor abnormal, militaristic nor pacifist. Its survival and economic health are best provided by a stable order. Neither China nor the United States threatens Japan militarily. Thus Japan has not seen fit to rearm extensively, despite its capacity to build aircraft carriers and nuclear weapons.⁷¹ Furthermore, Japan has shown no signs of balancing against China.

SOUTH KOREA, VIETNAM, AND THEIR NONBALANCING BEHAVIOR

Given the lack of evidence of Japanese balancing, might other countries in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia—particularly South Korea and Vietnam—seek to balance China? First, if forced to choose between the United States and China, it is unclear which state either country would support. Second, the importance of the United States in curtailing an Asian arms race may be overstated. If the United States pulls out of the region, China could take a greater role in organizing the system, and the countries of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia would adjust—with order preserved.

Realist theories would predict that both South Korea and Vietnam should welcome the United States and fear China. Yet this understates the historically complex relationship between these two countries and China. Both South Korea and Vietnam, while wary of China, are not obviously balancing against it. Historically, both have been forced to adjust to China even while attempting to retain autonomy, and this will most likely be true in the future as well. Both South Korea and Vietnam are known for their stubborn nationalism, gritty determination, and proud history as countries independent from China.⁷² From this perspective, it would probably be more surprising if they tried to balance against China by siding with the United States than it would be if they found a means of accommodating Beijing.

North Korea has consistently had better diplomatic relations with China than with any of its other communist patrons. In addition, China has managed

70. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Recent Developments in China and Japan-China Relations," briefing, January 16, 1999.

71. See Kent E. Calder, "Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State," *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (July 1988), pp. 517–541.

72. See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

to retain close relations with North Korea despite Beijing's recognition of South Korea and the rapid development of cultural and economic ties between South Korea and China. South Korea has shown considerable deference to China, especially in its reluctance to give full support to U.S. plans for theater missile defense (TMD).⁷³ Moreover, South Korean military planning—even the distant planning for postunification defense—has focused on maritime threats, not on a possible Chinese land invasion.⁷⁴ The anti-American demonstrations in late 2002 over the U.S. bases in South Korea reveal the complexity of Seoul's relationship with Washington. In addition, many in South Korea's business community see their future in China and have increasingly oriented their strategies in this direction, rather than toward the United States.

Regarding Vietnam, political scientist Ang Cheng Guan notes that “[in 1960] Ho Chi Minh appealed to Khrushchev to accede to the Chinese because, according to Ho, China was a big country. . . . Khrushchev retorted that the Soviet Union was by no means a small country. Ho replied, ‘For us it is doubly difficult. Don't forget, China is our neighbor.’”⁷⁵ Political scientist Kim Ninh writes that although “China remains the biggest external security threat to Vietnam . . . Vietnam is doing its best to cultivate friendly bilateral relations and is engaging in talks over a number of contentious issues between the two countries.”⁷⁶ Like North and South Korea, Vietnam shows no obvious signs of preparing to balance against a rising China. Also like the Koreas, Vietnam has historically stood in the shadow of China, and its relationship with China is both nuanced and complex. Ninh writes, “This love-hate, dependent-independent relationship with China is a fundamental factor in the Vietnamese conception of security.”⁷⁷

Today Vietnam is neither arming nor actively defending its border against China.⁷⁸ The past three decades have seen conflict between the two nations: Vietnam fought a short but bloody war with China in 1979, and in 1988 the two

73. This may also reflect South Korea's belief that TMD will not help it in a conventional war with the North. See Victor D. Cha, “TMD and Nuclear Weapons in Asia,” in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 458–496.

74. For discussion of the normalization of ties, see Daniel C. Sanford, *South Korea and the Socialist Countries: The Politics of Trade* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990). On military planning, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Waygyo Baekso* [Foreign policy white paper] (Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999).

75. Ang Cheng Guan, “Vietnam-China Relations since the End of the Cold War,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 12 (December 1998), p. 1141.

76. Kim Ninh, “Vietnam: Struggle and Cooperation,” in Alagappa, *Asian Security Practice*, p. 462.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

78. For a review, see Cecil B. Currey, “Vietnam: Foreign and Domestic Policies,” *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 1999), p. 197–198; and Guan, “Vietnam-China Relations since the End of the Cold War,” pp. 1122–1141.

countries engaged in a brief naval clash over the Spratly Islands. Both clashes, however, occurred under vastly different domestic and international conditions, and unlike the “people’s war” for independence fought against the French and the United States, neither was all encompassing. By the 1990s, border incidents between Vietnam and China had mostly disappeared, and unofficial border trade began to develop.⁷⁹

The major security concern between Vietnam and China is the unresolved issue of control over the Spratly Islands, a potentially oil-rich group of islands in the South China Sea. Yet Vietnamese and Chinese leaders have met annually since the normalization of relations between their countries in 1991, despite differences over the Spratlys, and relations have improved steadily over time. Ang Cheng Guan notes that “it is unlikely that the two countries [Vietnam and China] will engage in another military clash over their South China Sea dispute.”⁸⁰ In other areas, Vietnam has sought to take China’s perspective into its decisionmaking calculus, as well. For example, when Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam’s deputy foreign minister explicitly told reporters that his country’s entry should not worry China.⁸¹

The case of Vietnam shows that relations between dominant and secondary states do not necessarily have to be warm—accommodation can be grudging, as well. Since 1991, trade and other forms of economic cooperation have developed steadily between China and Vietnam. By 1997, this trade totaled \$1.44 billion, and China had invested an estimated \$102 million in Vietnam.⁸² In 1999 the two countries signed a tourism cooperation plan, allowing Chinese nationals to enter Vietnam without visas.⁸³ China also signed an economic agreement with Vietnam in 2000, providing \$55.25 million to upgrade the Thai Nguyen Steel Company and other industrial plants in Vietnam.⁸⁴ Thus indications are that Vietnam and China are developing a stable relationship.

SOUTHEAST ASIA AND CHINA

Nor do other Southeast Asian states seem to be balancing China. Although Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore all provide naval facilities to the United

79. Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam: Coping with China,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1994 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), p. 353.

80. Guan, “Vietnam-China Relations since the End of the Cold War,” p. 1140.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 1129.

82. Gu Xiaosong and Brantly Womack, “Border Cooperation between China and Vietnam in the 1990s,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (November/December 2000), p. 1045.

83. Tuyet Minh, “The Chinese Are Coming,” *Vietnam Economic News*, No. 33 (December 2000), p. 24.

84. “China to Aid Vietnamese Industry,” *Business Vietnam*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (June 2000), p. 4.

States, these countries also have deep economic and cultural ties with China, and none has shown an inclination to balance against it. Goldstein writes that Vietnam and the Philippines have joined ASEAN and repaired relations with the United States to counter possible Chinese influence, although he admits that this is a far cry from what actual alliances would offer. He writes that “[the Philippines], like other ASEAN states, neither has embraced a simple-minded strategy that treats China as an implacable foe to be balanced at all costs. Instead, both simultaneously engage China while hedging their bets.”⁸⁵

A dozen years is perhaps too short a time to predict that no country in Asia will seek to balance against China. Although U.S. power in the region may be a complicating factor, there is ample evidence that, contrary to the expectations of some realists, other Asian nations do not fear China. Scholars must begin to address this seeming anomaly. As James Przystup writes, “It is highly unlikely that Japan or America’s other allies in the region are prepared to join in a concerted containment strategy aimed at China. . . . They have voiced their apprehension that actions taken in Washington could cause them to be confronted with difficult choices.”⁸⁶ The existence of a U.S. alliance system that helps to reassure Asian allies of their security is insufficient to explain the dynamics of the entire region, and scholarship that explores Sino-Asian relations promises to be a fruitful line of inquiry into perceptions, strategies, and alliances in the region.⁸⁷

Conclusion

There is likely to be far more stability in Asia—and more bandwagoning with China—than balance of power theorists expect. The rapid economic and political changes in both Northeast and Southeast Asia over the past thirty years have not led to major instability, in part because of the vast U.S. political, economic, and military presence in the region. Also, there is evidence, as shown in this article, that China is likely to act within bounds acceptable to the other Asian nations. If this is the case, U.S. attempts to form a balancing coalition against China may be counterproductive. As countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia increasingly orient their economic and political focus toward

85. Goldstein, “Balance of Power Politics,” p. 193.

86. Przystup, “China, Japan, and the United States,” p. 37.

87. This lack of balancing should not be surprising. International relations scholars are engaged in a lively discussion about whether U.S. predominance is a “unipolar illusion” and whether such a system is in fact stable.

China, Asian nations, if forced to choose between the United States and China, may not make the choice that many Westerners assume they will. Historically, it has been Chinese weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved.

The paradigm wars have grown stale: Pitting realism, constructivism, and liberalism against one another and then attempting to prove one right while dismissing the others has created a body of soul-crushingly boring research. More useful approaches would include moving within the paradigms and examining the interaction between the unit level and the system. In this vein, recognition that Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia may offer new insights to international relations theorists should be welcome. Examining the possibility that these regions may pose new empirical and theoretical challenges could lead to a fruitful research agenda. Moving the field of international relations in this direction, however, will not be easy.

The debate over area studies versus political science theorizing has been healthy for the field of comparative politics, focusing as it has on important issues of research methodology and evidentiary standards.⁸⁸ Indeed scholars in the field of comparative politics take for granted questions that international relations specialists have only begun to address. These include whether politics in other regions operate differently from the standard European model based on the Westphalian state system, and if so, how and why. In comparative politics, it is accepted that in different countries formal institutions such as “democracy” may not operate in the same way, that authoritarianism has many disparate causes and consequences, and that economic policymaking may differ.⁸⁹ While much of comparative politics involves applying models and theories originally developed to explain political institutions in the United States to other countries, there is also a consistent stream of research that flows

88. See Robert Bates, “Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 1997), pp. 166–169; Peter J. Katzenstein, “Area and Regional Studies in the United States,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 789–791; and Kenneth Prewitt, “Presidential Items,” *Items*, Vol. 50, Nos. 2–3 (June/September 1996), pp. 31–40.

89. See David Collier, ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Guillermo A. O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). On states and markets, see Chalmers A. Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–75* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982); Alice H. Amsden, *Asia’s Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

from area specialists that informs and furthers scholars' theories.⁹⁰ There is no one answer: At times general models explain problems better than do case studies; at other times evidence from the cases forces adjustments in the models.

Comparative politics is more than a passive recipient of political economy theories developed in the United States and Europe. It involves spirited dialogue between theory and evidence. The international relations discipline could follow this example, but it will require openness to this possibility. In that way, despite the internecine battles in the study of comparative politics, that field has done more than the international relations field to embrace a healthy tension and dialogue between theory and area studies, as well as between U.S. and European models and how they are applied in the rest of the world. One can note difference without it becoming caricature, and that is the goal to which the field of international relations should aspire.

There are two general ways in which Asian international relations might prove different. The first concerns the nature of the state. Although countries in Asia are superficially "Westphalian," they do not share the same process of development as countries in the West, nor are they designed to address the same pressures and issues that drove the development of the European nation-state system.⁹¹ Asia has different historical traditions, different geographic and political realities, and different cultural traditions. Thus it should not be surprising if nation-states in Asia do not necessarily function like states in the West or if they are preoccupied with issues that European nations for the most part resolved long ago, such as internal conflict or questions of legitimacy. On the one hand, many countries in Northeast Asia (e.g., China, Japan, and Korea) have centuries of experience as formal political units, and their histories as sovereign political entities often predate those in the West. Not only does this mean that their national identities may have deeper roots; it also means that Asian perspectives on nationalism and identity may be different, and that issues of legitimacy or nationalism may not be the most important issues for governments in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, many countries in Southeast and South Asia (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines) were not as

90. Examples include Robert H. Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics: Understanding Regime Change in Central Asia," University of Notre Dame, 2001.

91. On Westphalian states, see Krasner, *Sovereignty*.

formally organized—even by the mid-twentieth century. For these countries, the creation of modern nation-states has been a different process than it was in Europe, as they have had to establish their political and economic institutions while interacting with states that already have those institutions. These nation-states have been concerned with crafting legitimacy, incorporating ethnic factions, and forging a sense of national identity.

A second major difference is the historical path that Asian nations have taken as they became incorporated into the larger international system. The legacy of Western colonialism in Southeast Asia, and Japanese colonialism in East Asia, remains vivid and continues to influence relations between states in Asia and with the West. The Philippines has been indelibly altered because of its relations with the United States, from its political institutions to its passion for basketball. China, Japan, and Korea also have complex pasts that involve war and occupation, while Southeast Asia is one of the great crossroads of the world, where Indian, Muslim, and Chinese civilizations intersect. These countries also have complex relations with their former colonial rulers and with each other. And although Asian countries were incorporated more recently as nation-states, they deal with situations not *de novo* but rather within a set of existing global alliances, conflicts, and institutions. This may mean that their foreign relations operate differently than those in the West. Given the very different historical paths these states have taken, and the different set of issues and circumstances that they have faced, it would be surprising if their foreign relations did not include some differences as well.

For the field of international relations in general, and the study of Asian security in particular, the coming years provide an opportunity to make exciting advances. A vigorous dialogue between theory and evidence holds the promise of enriching all the major international relations paradigms, as well as the deepening scholarly understanding of Asia. By avoiding an implicitly Eurocentric approach to Asia, and more accurately theorizing and problematizing international relations in Asia, scholars in the fields of international relations and Asian security appear poised to make major strides.