

**Re-evaluating the Prospect of International Conflict in East Asia**

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## **Abstract**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, scholars of East Asia have speculated on the prospect of international peace as the global order has reverted to a multipolar character. Many of these scholars' prognoses were largely optimistic, citing 20th-century restructurings of domestic and international political and economic systems as well as regional historical precedent as justification. The objective of this study is to evaluate these claims vis-a-vis recent political and economic developments in the East Asian arena.

## **Introduction**

It is now almost 28 years since Francis Fukuyama famously declared the “end point in mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human governance.”<sup>1</sup> While Fukuyama’s promise of a post-Cold War world scattered with “ethnic and nationalist violence[,],... terrorism[,], and wars of liberation”<sup>2</sup> has certainly been kept,<sup>3</sup> the veracity of his assertions regarding not only liberal democracy’s continued ubiquity but also its efficacy as a peace-bringing mechanism has yet to be agreed upon. For some, it is the very same localized conflicts which Fukuyama predicted which constitute a “new threat to global security

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of major examples of this type of conflict from 1989-99, see Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and human welfare.”<sup>4</sup> For others, it is a number of problematics present in the way in which various regions are reverting to a multipolar character which is cause for concern.<sup>5</sup>

Central to the discussion of global security in the 21st century is East Asia. Given that the region houses roughly one fifth of the world’s population as well as two of the three largest economies on the planet,<sup>6</sup> the importance of considering East Asia in the discussion of global security is obvious. Beyond the sheer size and economic magnitude of the region, several other qualities of East Asia seem to point to its representing a noteworthy security situation, such as its unique mix of democratic and undemocratic states,<sup>7</sup> the looming cloud of unsettled scores and diverging histories regarding 20th century geopolitics,<sup>8</sup> and the breakneck rise of an opaque, undemocratic superpower in China. As such, there exists a great wealth of scholarly literature regarding the prospect of peace in East Asia. However, there is oftentimes little that these analyses and the prognoses they offer have in common. For the most pessimistic writers, the cocktail of different government types, disagreement over 20th century history, uncertainty regarding the future role of The United States in regional affairs, and a rising China has created a situation in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> This position is perhaps best articulated in Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94)

<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2017

<sup>7</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 15-16

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of diverging histories among East Asian nations regarding The Pacific War as well as their implications, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki et al., *East Asia Beyond the History Wars: Confronting the Ghosts of Violence* (London, Routledge Press, 2013)

which the region's eruption into a state of conflict is only a matter of time.<sup>9</sup> According to more optimistic thinkers, this "wait-and-see" attitude towards East Asian geopolitics is insufficient.<sup>10</sup> For these writers, the region's ostensibly unwavering commitment to international economic cooperation and interdependence as well as its regional particularity as a historically Sinocentric area will, among other factors, be enough to ensure pacifism through the current period of shifting power distribution.<sup>11</sup>

When examining these remarkable discrepancies in the way scholars view the future of East Asian security, several important questions present themselves. How can scholars examine the same situation often using similar tools and theoretical frameworks but draw such diverging

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of this type of analysis, see Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5-33; Richard K. Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War," *ibid.*, pp. 34-77; 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. 62-66; Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the Constraint of China," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107-135; and Nicholas Khoo et al., "China Engages Asia? Caveat Lector," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 196-211.

<sup>10</sup> See David Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 57-85 (Spring 2003), wherein the author argues that predictions of conflict "in the future" are not verifiable and therefore should not be taken seriously.

<sup>11</sup> For examples of optimistic analyses of the East Asian situation, 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); 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; David Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 57-85 (Spring 2003); and David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia," *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 64-99 (Winter 2004/05).

conclusions? What might these differences say about the problems of International Relations as a discipline and what work might be done to ameliorate those problems? Finally (and most importantly), who is right? Is it still too early to tell which way international relations on the east end of the Eurasian continent will go, or can we now, nearly 28 years after “the end of history,” start to empirically re-evaluate the prospect of international conflict in East Asia? The goal of this paper is to provide potential answers to these questions. It will begin by addressing the profoundly different analyses offered by what we might call “optimists” and “pessimists”<sup>12</sup> as a function of a fundamental disagreement on whether or not International Relations theory developed out of the Western experience is applicable to the East Asian situation. From here, the paper will evaluate some of the key assertions offered by optimists regarding the prospect for international conflict vis-à-vis recent social, political, and economic developments in the region. The paper will conclude by offering its own prognosis for East Asia as well as a number of proposals for improving the way scholars analyze and speculate on the future of international relations within a given region.

### **Challenges to “Optimistic” Analyses of East Asian International Relations**

Study of the East Asian region constitutes a vast scholastic domain which comprises multiple disciplines and a dizzying array of subfields. As with any healthy and developed academic discipline, disagreements among scholars are a common and welcomed part of East Asian regional analysis. However, when a discipline reaches a point at which scholars’ disagreements stem from errant evidence selection and mishandling of theory, it becomes clear that such a discipline’s

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<sup>12</sup> Here, we can define “optimists” as those who view the probability of continued peace in Asia as high and “pessimists” as those who believe the opposite to be true.

methods and scholarship require some troubleshooting on a basic level. Such seems to be the case with discussion of East Asian international relations, especially as it pertains to prognoses of stability and conflict. Indeed, scholars in this domain have become prone to rejecting foundational IR theory without offering substantial, verifiable counter-theory as well as ignoring substantial data which contradicts their theses, resulting in analyses which may not be comprehensive or helpful.

The goal of this section will be to examine what seem to be the main points of contention between ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ scholars. These are the points whose judgement typically serves as the basis of an East Asian international relations analysis’ character as either ‘optimistic’ or ‘pessimistic.’ The section will be divided into four parts. First will be a discussion on International Relations Theory and its applicability to the East Asian context (that is to say that optimistic readings might argue against its applicability while pessimists might argue for it). After that will be a brief discussion of the rise of China (stabilizing or destabilizing?) followed by an analysis of existing multilateral regional organizations (sufficient or insufficient?), and finally a discussion of the shifting regional role of The United States (waning peacefully or remounting dangerously?).

### ***I. The Need for Non-Western International Relations Theory?***

In his often-cited critique of ‘realist’ analyses of East Asian international relations, David Kang offers that the failure of IR scholars to accurately assess the way Asian nations interact stems from IR theory’s ostensibly exclusive basis in the European historiography.<sup>13</sup> Seemingly operating with a Gramscian understanding of knowledge and hegemony, Kang insists that the totality of IR theory derived from European states’ interactions with nations in the West, the East, and beyond

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<sup>13</sup> Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” pp. 57-58

is “no longer sufficient for a well-trained international relations generalist.”<sup>14</sup> Kang is certainly not alone in expressing this sentiment. The idea that ‘cultural differences’ preclude the usefulness of IR theory born of Western thinkers as it pertains to the Asian context appears frequently as a foundational premise for many ‘optimistic’ analyses of contemporary East Asian geopolitics.<sup>15</sup> Typically, authors who employ this argument do so as a shorthand, catch-all way of negating realist and otherwise positivist analysis techniques. That is to say that, upon encountering a theoretically-derived assertion which contradicts their thesis, these authors opt not to engage with the actual mechanics of the argument, but rather to denounce it *à priori* because of its theoretical basis, offering that such theory has no business being applied to Asia in the first place.

Such a call for International Relations Theory which transcends the purported restrictions the discipline ostensibly suffers because of its Western origins has even spurred several serious attempts at defining what such ‘non-Western’ theory might look like. Perhaps the most often cited example of such an effort is Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya’s 2010 work *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia*.<sup>16</sup> Here, the authors criticize current paradigms in IR Theory for their inherent parochialism and ethnocentrism, arguing that ‘hidden’ contributions to the study of the world by non-Western thinkers (e.g. Chinese world history, Islamic dualism, Japanese philosophy, etc.) ought to be revisited in order for scholars to

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<sup>14</sup> Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong,” p. 58

<sup>15</sup> For other examples of authors who employ a similar argument to invalidate the application of established IR theory to the Asian context, see 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; Thomas Berger, “Set for Stability? Prospects for Conflict and Cooperation in East Asia,” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 26 (2000), pp. 405-428;

<sup>16</sup> Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010).

understand how non-Western peoples saw their place in the world prior to the introduction of Western intellectualism and, by extension, how they may be coming to see themselves again in an age of decolonization and re-acquaintance with pre-colonial ideologies.

While the authors' proposal of new theoretical frameworks which would expand our analytical imagination may be attractive at first, a close look at exactly what theory the authors aim to supplant exposes the argument as ambiguous at best. Perhaps most troubling is the authors' decision not to clearly define what makes "Western" theory "Western." Throughout the book, the authors indicate their rejection of a hard East-West divide as a 'real' category of analysis, though it is that very divide which serves as the foundational premise of their study. In addition, the authors accurately identify the origin of many basic notions of contemporary IR Theory (e.g. 'civilization,' 'sovereignty,' 'anarchy,' etc.) in the Greek intellectual tradition. As IR scholar Kimberly Hutchins points out,

"Ancient Greek thought did not emerge in a vacuum, but was shaped by, as well as influencing, traditions of African and Asian thought. It is no more 'Western' than 'non-Western.' It was claimed for the 'West' in retrospect as part of the self-understanding of the European ages of renaissance, discovery and empire not because of 'where' it originated, but because of the kind of dialogue that it is."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kimberly Hutchins, "Dialogue between Whom? The Role of the West/Non-West Distinction in Promoting Global Dialogue in IR," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2011), pp. 639–647



Indeed, though the claiming of various ideas, attitudes, and ideological frameworks as “Western” may have represented a novel development in European history, the ideas, attitudes, and ideological frameworks themselves were far from new. Historian Jack Goody tells us that “the major societies of Eurasia were fired in the same crucible.”<sup>18</sup>

The veracity of this statement is supported by the myriad ideological parallels between fundamental notions of ‘Western’ IR theory and ‘non-Western’ world-study long before any sustained contact between the two realms was to be established. Within the Chinese tradition alone, we begin to see mention of ‘country’ (國) in the oracle bone scripts (pictured left<sup>19</sup>) of the last millennium BCE. In the Book of Rites, Confucius and his contemporaries demonstrate their knowledge of countries’ existing in plurality, separated by borders.<sup>20</sup> The Analects of Confucius from the 3rd century BCE display an understanding of country and the institutions which govern it as bearing the responsibility of maintaining the wellbeing of those who live within as well as the economy which connects them.<sup>21</sup> Also from Confucius, we see an



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<sup>18</sup>Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 226-7

<sup>19</sup>The Chinese Text Project, “國 ” (The Chinese Text Project, 2016). [Link](#)

<sup>20</sup> Confucius writes, “When he had passed through the state (where he was), and reached its frontier, he stopped and wailed, giving full vent to his sorrow” (國 之 境 也 止 而 哭 也 ). For the full passage, see: Confucius, *Liji*, trad.

James Legge, quoted in The Chinese Text Project, “國 之 境 也 止 而 哭 也 - Ben Sang,” (The Chinese Text Project, 2016). [Link](#)

<sup>21</sup> Confucius writes "The master said: ‘To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper

understanding of such economic and social maintenance being enacted through a country's particular administration, social forms, and ceremonial rites.<sup>22</sup> In the “Lǐyùn” chapter of the same text, Confucius bemoans contemporary administration, social forms, and ceremonial rites, describing reverently an alternative “course” (□ ) by means of which

“ a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. (They accumulated) articles (of value), disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground, but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. (They laboured) with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted, but not exerting it (only) with a view to their own advantage. In this way (selfish) schemings were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence

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seasons.” (□ □ □ □ □ : □ □ □ □ □ , □ □ □ □ □ , □ □ □ □ □ ). For the full passage, see: Confucius, *Analects*,

trad. James Legge, quoted in The Chinese Text Project, “□ □ - Xue Er,” (The Chinese Text Project, 2016). [Link](#).

<sup>22</sup> These facets of society represent the focus of Confucius, *The Book of Rites*, trad. James Legge, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 27 (1885)

the outer doors remained open, and were not shut.”<sup>23</sup>

This “Great Harmony” (大同) represents what Confucius and his like-minded peers saw as the ideal society which all means of social organization should strive to attain and is viewed by contemporary scholars as representing the foundational premise of Chinese world study.<sup>24</sup> Inasmuch as this ‘course’ serves to ‘repress’ the inherently selfish, rebellious, and thieving tendencies of peoples which would otherwise ‘show themselves’ in a world without such a ‘course,’ we see in the notion of the Great Harmony an understanding of human behavior as being characterized by aggressivity and parsimoniousness. For the Confucians, this selfish nature manifested itself in the international relations they observed, wherein countries were at odds for securing their own interests. 3rd century BCE philosopher Mencius tells us of “competing vassals” in faraway districts.<sup>25</sup> Mencius tells us of king Hui of Liang, who, “for the matter of territory, tore and destroyed his people, leading them to battle.”<sup>26</sup>

If we are to examine all of these features of ‘the international’ as they were understood by Chinese thinkers during the Warring States period as an ensemble (countries comprised of selfish,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Yaqing Qin, “Why is there no Chinese International Relations Theory?” in Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Mencius, *Exaltation of the Virtuous I*, trad. W. P. Mei, quoted in The Chinese Text Project, “尚□ □ - Exaltation of the Virtuous I” (The Chinese Text Project, 2016). [Link](#)

<sup>26</sup> Mencius, *Jin Xin II*, trad. W. P. Mei, quoted in The Chinese Text Project, “□ □ □ - Jin Xin II” (The Chinese Text Project, 2016).

aggressive people which are governed by institutions whose aim is to ensure the survival of the country and the people who occupy it by competing selfishly for territory, resources, etc.), it is not unreasonable that the picture of international relations painted by the ancient Chinese be likened to classical realists' analyses of inter-state behavior. Roughly 1800 years after Confucian thinkers wrote about the world the way it appeared to them, 16th century Italian theorist Niccolò Machiavelli also described the political world as being informed by innate human greed which engenders continual conflict over competing interests.<sup>27</sup> 20th century German theorist Hans Morgenthau articulated this idea more explicitly, declaring that "international politics is struggle for power"<sup>28</sup> If we are able to recognize substantial parallels between pre-common era Chinese philosophy and some of the foundational principles of contemporary IR theory, then perhaps it is time to abandon the project of differentiating "Western" IR theory from older, ostensibly distinct "non-Western" thought.

However, many opponents of IR theory's applicability to Asia recognize these and other striking similarities between contemporary international relations theory and its "non-Western" counterparts. David Kang tells us that, while Asian and Western IR may in fact resemble each other to a great extent, we ought to focus on whether or not we can discern substantial differences between the two, "and if so, why?"<sup>29</sup> IR scholar Yaqing Qin describes profound differences between the "big ideas" which characterize American IR ('democratic peace') and Chinese IR ('the Great Harmony'). Per Kang's prompt to tackle the 'why' responsible for the difference, Qin

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<sup>27</sup>Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) pp. 4–15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong," p. 59

argues that the American tradition circulates around its post-WWII preoccupation of ‘hegemonic maintenance’ whereas the Chinese school of thought relates to its undertaking of the communist project in the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>30</sup> Barry Buzan and Richard Little take this idea of preoccupation further, offering that the European experience post-1800 and the understandings of international relations which it inspired are necessarily tainted by colonialist frameworks.<sup>31</sup> Prior to 1800, they argue, sustained European contact with major Asian civilizations was effectuated on Asian terms. This is to say that, during the ‘pre-modern’ era, Asian civilizations which chose to engage in trade or other activities with Europeans did so from “a position of strength.”<sup>32</sup> For Buzan and Little, it wasn’t until “local interests [from Europe] seeking to expand involvement generally won out over those wishing to limit it” that this power relationship flipped and the European understanding of international relations began to take form.<sup>33</sup>

However, what is worth noting is that, as described previously, thinkers from China during a period when its international experience was observed from ‘a position of strength’ reached many of the same conclusions about international relations as the Europeans did once they reached their own ‘position of strength.’ Similarly, the Islamic Golden Age saw the development of “ancestral forms of what is called today identity, the hegemonic cycle and the notion of ‘civilisations’” via

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<sup>30</sup> Yaqing Qin, “Why is there no Chinese International Relations Theory?” p. 40

<sup>31</sup> Barry Buzan and Richard Little, “World History and the Development of Non-Western International Relations Theory,” in Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), pp. 208-221

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 205-6

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

the philosophy of 14th century thinker Ibn Khaldun.<sup>34</sup> Instances of likeness do not end here, however; volumes could be (and perhaps ought to be) written detailing parallel understandings of the world among civilizations with little sustained contact. With this in mind, should we not posit that such notions are likely not negatively framed by or even unique to the European experience, but rather a recurring characteristic of civilizations who reach a certain ‘position of strength’ technologically, economically, and geopolitically such that these conclusions become evident to them? What I am not suggesting here is the existence of a discernible ‘universality’ *à la positiviste*, but rather of a trend among civilizations which occupy similar positions internationally which seems to negate the notion that the European understanding is insufficient solely based on its roots in empirical knowledge acquired through colonialism. For this reason, and in the absence of a substantial ontological critique of ‘Western’ IR which goes beyond its usual *à priori* dismissal, I offer that the multitude of parallel ideas which we can identify between contemporary IR and its ‘non-Western’ predecessors demonstrate that the two are *similar enough* to justify the application of contemporary international relations theory to the Asian context.

## ***II. Notes on China’s rise***

A point that seemingly all analyses of the East Asian situation have in common is that they pay a great deal of attention to The Republic of China and its dynamic role in the region. This comes as no surprise, since, as Steve Chan points out, China’s economy has enjoyed “an average annual growth rate of 9 percent, quadrupling its people’s average income” and is expected to

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<sup>34</sup> Jack Kalpakian, “Ibn Khaldun's Influence on Current International Relations Theory,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 13:3 (2008), pp. 41-63

“overtake... the U.S. [economy] by 2039.”<sup>35</sup> While the unprecedented speed and magnitude of China’s rise is apparent to all, the question of whether or not observers can expect China’s ascension to economic superpowerdom to stabilize or destabilize regional and global political order remains a point of contention among scholars. Optimistic analysts argue the former outcome, that China’s dramatic rebound represents a sort of ‘return to form’ for a region characterized for centuries by a sinocentric international political economy.<sup>36</sup> As scholar David Shambaugh boldly puts it, “most nations in the region now see China as a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a non-threatening regional power.”<sup>37</sup> David Kang attempts to clarify Shambaugh’s ambiguous assertion about the sentiment of “most nations,” arguing that, while “East Asian countries have accommodated rather than balanced China’s rapid economic, diplomatic, and political emergence over three decades,” there remain a handful of purported ‘outliers’ who harbor skepticism regarding China’s intentions.<sup>38</sup>

One of these overlookable outliers, Kang concedes, is none other than Japan, the second largest economic power in the region.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, public sentiment regarding The Republic of China among Japanese citizens is decisively negative. Since 2005, Japanese research organization

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<sup>35</sup> Steve Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory* (London, Routledge, 2008), p. ix

<sup>36</sup> For analyses which evoke this notion of historical memory as a basis for arguing China’s designation as a stabilizing power in East Asia, see David Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 57-85 (Spring 2003); David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York, Columbia Press, 2007); David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia,” *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 64-99 (Winter 2004/05).

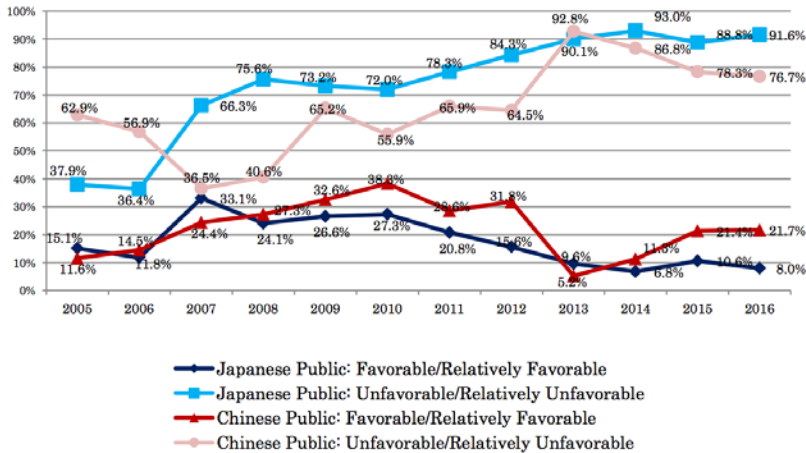
<sup>37</sup> David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia,” *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 64-99 (Winter 2004/05).

<sup>38</sup> Kang, *China Rising*, p. 4

<sup>39</sup> Kang, *China Rising*, p. 4

Genron NPO has conducted an annual survey of both Chinese and Japanese citizens which prompts them to describe their impression of the other country. In 2016, 91.6% of Japanese respondents described harboring an “unfavorable/relatively unfavorable” opinion of China.<sup>40</sup> This nearly

【Impression of the Other Country】



unanimous disapproval of China among the Japanese is anything but an ephemeral trend. Indeed, Genron NPO’s twelve volumes of survey data show conclusively that unfavorable sentiment of China has steadily grown since the first year the survey was conducted.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps more troubling, 66.8% of respondents felt that the

bilateral relationship between Japan and China had worsened during the previous year, with more than 50% speculating that the relationship would only continue to deteriorate in coming years.<sup>42</sup>

However, as previously stated, most optimistic analysts of the East Asia situation *do* recognize the abysmal outlook on China held by the Japanese. In fact, some analysts even use Japanese anti-China sentiment as a comparative benchmark in order to argue that, since other countries’ sentiments towards China are ostensibly less severe, it must follow that these countries view China as a “good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a non-threatening

<sup>40</sup> The Genron NPO, “The 12th Japan-China Joint Opinion Poll Analysis Report on the Comparative Data,” (The Genron NPO, 2016), p. 3. [Link](#)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 10



regional power.”<sup>43</sup> Mishandling or even completely overlooking data on Japanese anti-China sentiment, optimistic analyses of the East Asia situation which view China’s rise as a stabilizing factor typically support their claim of East Asian nations’ ‘accommodating’ China by citing a lack of military mobilization against China and a lack of institutional barriers created through multilateral organizations which constrain China economically.<sup>44</sup> Since-- so the argument goes-- countries like Vietnam, South Korea, Hong Kong, and The Philippines are neither actively gearing up for armed conflict with China nor organizing themselves institutionally to put a check on China’s economic prowess, these countries view must China’s growing power favorably. While the empirical evidence upon which this assertion is based is valid (there is, indeed, no discernable military mobilization or institutional blocking against China by its East Asian neighbors at present), engaging with this evidence alone while failing to sufficiently acknowledge increasingly negative public sentiment about China throughout East Asia (read: not just in Japan) paints an incomplete picture of the situation.

A 2013 Gallup poll asked participants to identify one country which for them represented the largest threat to world peace going forward. Unsurprisingly, among Japanese respondents, China was the most frequent answer, accounting for nearly 40% of responses to the question.<sup>45</sup> However, contrary to the overwhelmingly pro-China position prescribed to them by optimistic analysts, respondents from The Philippines and Vietnam echoed this same sentiment. Among the answers collected from Filipino participants, China was most frequently named as the largest threat

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<sup>43</sup> Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia,” p. 64

<sup>44</sup> These positions are perhaps best articulated in Kang, *China Rising*; but similar positions are also taken in Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia”; and Steve Chan, *China, The U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory*

<sup>45</sup> Gallup International, “Japan Results Summary,” (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

to world peace, representing 22% of responses.<sup>46</sup> The data collected from Vietnamese participants was even more decisive, with 54% of respondents viewing China as the globe's biggest threat, more than three times as many as the second most frequent response (The United States).<sup>47</sup> With the exception of Thailand, China was one of the top three most frequent responses for all other bordering or nearby countries included in the survey (India,<sup>48</sup> Hong Kong,<sup>49</sup> and Korea<sup>50</sup>).

When considered in the context of the fond, neighborly sentiments described by writers like Kang and Shambaugh, this data presents two important questions. First-- if, as these scholars claim, China is viewed by its neighbors as more of a friend than a threat, what is the source of this widespread anxiety about China among East Asian people? Second-- if, as the Gallup and Genron NPO data suggests, East Asian people view China as an opponent to peace and stability, why, as writers like Kang and Shambaugh point out, does this sentiment not manifest itself in terms of military activity and institutional balancing?

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<sup>46</sup> Gallup International, "The Philippines Results Summary," (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

<sup>47</sup> Gallup International, "Vietnam Results Summary," (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

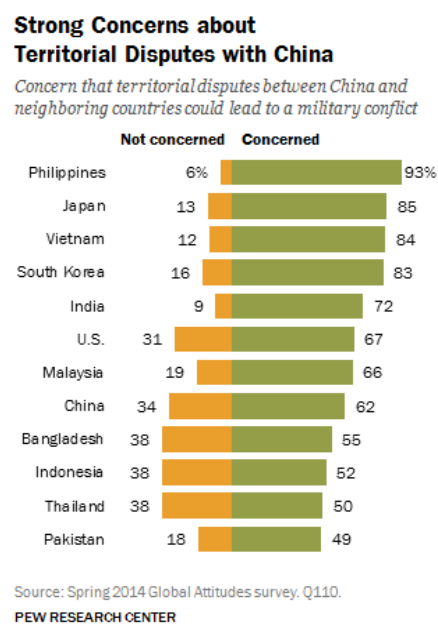
<sup>48</sup> Gallup International, "India Results Summary," (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

<sup>49</sup> Gallup International, "Hong Kong Results Summary," (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

<sup>50</sup> Gallup International, "Korea Results Summary," (Gallup International, 2014), p. 13 [Link](#)

As far as Japan is concerned, this first question can be answered by returning to Genron NPO’s 2016 field report. When asked what actions China might take in the near future which worry them, 64.6% of Japanese respondents selected “[Chinese] intrusions into territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands.”<sup>51</sup> Over half of respondents also cited “feeling uneasy about China’s coercive actions in the international community”<sup>52</sup> as justification for their unfavorable sentiment towards the country. According to the study’s accompanying analytical report, incidence of both of these responses rose 20% from 2015, suggesting that anxiety regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute eventually reaching a tipping point and China’s increasing international clout is only getting worse.<sup>53</sup> While Genron NPO analysts concede that this dramatic increase coincides with “heavy media coverage of the presence of Chinese ships in disputed waters and the growing unease of many Japanese about China’s activities in the seas near Japan around the time the survey was conducted,”<sup>54</sup> it is clear that, in the eyes of the Japanese, unfavorable attitudes towards China are based in real, contemporary geopolitical episodes and the dramatic repercussions they may inspire.

Once again, Japan is not alone in this sentiment. China’s numerous territorial disputes with its neighbors have caused a great many East Asians to worry about the prospect of China laying claim to



<sup>51</sup> Yasushi Kudo, “Polls show Sino-Japan public sentiment worsens; direct interaction key to improvement,” (Genron NPO, 2016) [Link](#)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

their own countries' territories and the possibility of conflict to which such a dispute could lead. According to a 2014 PEW Research Center study, majorities of respondents in eleven East Asian nations described "strong concerns that territorial disputes between China and neighboring countries could lead to military conflict."<sup>55</sup> While concern was expressed most prominently in countries with which China either currently is or recently was embroiled in some sort of territorial dispute (Japan, India, Vietnam, The Philippines, etc.), the majority of respondents in virtually all countries surveyed (including China itself) feel there is sufficient reason to believe that these territorial disputes will eventually leave the realm of discursive posturing and devolve into much more serious and damaging conflicts.

This brings us to the second question: why, then, has this escalation from territorial dispute to military confrontation yet to occur? This is especially puzzling if we are to consider the 20th-century track record of some of the countries implicated in these recent territorial disputes. Take Vietnam, for example. Following the conclusion of World War II, the Vietnamese successfully engaged and fought off encroaching foreign powers on three separate occasions, including a relative victory over China itself.<sup>56</sup> Why, then, would Vietnam opt not to stand up to China now, in the face of "territorial disputes over the Paracels and the Spratly Islands, the southern part of the

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<sup>55</sup> Pew Research Poll, "How Asians View Each Other," (Pew Reserach Poll, 2014) [Link](#)

<sup>56</sup> For a comprehensive account of the First Indochina War and its decisive conclusion at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, see Edward Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance: The French Left, Indochina, and the Cold War, 1944–1954* (Greenwood, 1986). For analysis of Vietnam's victory over The United States in the Second Indochina War, see Kolko, Gabriel, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1985). For discussion of the Third Indochina War against China, see O'dowd, Edward, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007).

Gulf of Tonkin still not [being] demarcated, and Chinese vessels routinely harass[ing] Vietnamese or foreign investors' seismic research vessels or fishermen"?<sup>57</sup> The reason why such an event has yet to surface likely lies in the profound differences in the political, institutional, and economic contexts surrounding 20th century Indochina and present-day Vietnam. Indeed, 20th century Vietnam did not yet enjoy the level of trade interdependence that it now does in the age of neoliberalism, nor its current institutional links through multilateral organizations, nor the geopolitical context of 40 years of relative regional peace. Being that these differences could constitute a lengthy volume on their own, they will not be discussed in detail here. What is important to bear in mind, however, is that while these factors certainly represent obstacles to conflict, there is no reason to believe that they are insurmountable barriers to conflict. To argue the contrary-- that China's rise will not spur conflict simply because it has not yet spurred conflict-- is simply an exercise in faulty induction.<sup>58</sup> In the face of mounting suspicion and disfavor of China among East Asian people due in large part to these territorial disputes and a recent historical precedent of territorial encroachment resulting in conflict, it is essential that scholars consider China's rise potentially representing a threat to regional peace as something well within the realm of possibility.

Exterior politics aside, many optimistic analyses of China's rise and its implications for security in East Asia seem to be built upon the problematic assumption that China will be able to maintain domestic stability indefinitely. While some optimistic analysts stipulate that their

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<sup>57</sup> Gabriel Dominguez, "China's Xi aiming to 'reset' ties on Vietnam visit" (*DW*, 2015)

<sup>58</sup> For more on fallacious induction, see Hans Hansen and Robert Pinto, *Fallacies: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) pp. 64-68.

prognoses for regional stability could be valid *if and only if* China is able to reconcile several alarming domestic problems,<sup>59</sup> most seem to view China's continued internal stability as a foregone conclusion.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, during the course of the nation's breakneck ascent over the course of the last four decades, a number of daunting challenges have presented themselves.

Of China's domestic issues, the one which likely represents the most formidable threat in the short-term is its environmental situation. Since the 1980s, air and surface water pollution in and around China's urban centers has alarmed both scientists and policy-makers alike.<sup>61</sup> An unfortunate consequence of rapid urbanization, coal-dependent energy production, and high-volume production in heavy manufacturing sectors (steel, petroleum refinement, automotive production, etc.),<sup>62</sup> air heavily polluted by various carcinogenic particulates has become the fourth largest threat to the health of Chinese citizens.<sup>63</sup> The rate of death by air pollution-related lung cancer among Chinese citizens has increased by 464.8% since 1970, accounting for hundreds of thousands of deaths each year.<sup>64</sup> Aside from the devastating effects China's pollution crisis creates for public health, its economic effects are equally troubling. During air quality 'red alert' episodes in China's urban centers, people are ordered to remain indoors in order to avoid the unbreathable outside air, often to the detriment of local commerce.<sup>65</sup> This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed

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<sup>59</sup> Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia," p. 68

<sup>60</sup> Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong," p. 61

<sup>61</sup> J Mumford et al., "Lung Cancer and Indoor Air Pollution in Xuan Wei, China" *Science*, vol. 235 (1987).

<sup>62</sup> Chak Chan and Xiaohong Yao, "Air Pollution in Mega Cities in China," *Atmospheric Environment*, vol. 42 no. 1 (January 2008) pp. 1-42

<sup>63</sup> Zhu Chen et al., "China Tackles the Health Effects of Air Pollution" *The Lancet*, vol. 382 (2013) pp. 1959-60

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Chak Chan and Xiaohong Yao, "Air Pollution in Mega Cities in China," pp. 12-13

by policy-makers in Beijing. 2012 saw the launch of the ‘National Plan on Air Pollution Control in Key Regions’ as a part of the twelfth Five-Year Plan, the Chinese government’s first comprehensive crackdown on key industries and practices which are understood to exacerbate the problem.<sup>66</sup> Although these measures were followed by similar legislation on a domestic level as well as international accords like the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement, many experts are uncertain as to whether Beijing’s efforts to clean up the air are enough to mend a situation that “so quickly got so out of hand.”<sup>67</sup>

Pollution of already scarce surface water sources is another contributor to China’s environmental sustainability problem. While heightened governmental regulations have improved the rate at which industrial wastewater is treated, the amount of untreated sewage discharge more than doubled between 1995 and 2004.<sup>68</sup> According to a recent national survey, 28% of water sampled from the country’s seven largest rivers is of the lowest quality rating possible, rendering it unsuitable for any practical use, including agriculture.<sup>69</sup> Growing scarcity of usable water has led Chinese agribusiness leaders to question the sustainability and quality of food production. Since the middle of the last decade, both private and state-owned Chinese enterprises have embarked on a dizzying spree of purchasing immense sections of farmland in foreign countries for the production of agricultural products for export back to China. As of 2012, transactions of this

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<sup>66</sup> Zhu Chen et al., p. 1959

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Kuh, “For some in China’s Middle Class, Pollution is Spurring Action,” (NPR, 2017); Hongjun Zhan, “Legislation is better; enforcement is still weak” (BBC, 2017); Hong Soon-do, “China’s booming tech is not enough to solve smog” (*AsiaToday*, 2016);

<sup>68</sup> Min Shao et al., “City clusters in China: air and surface water pollution” *Frontiers in Ecology and The Environment*, vol. 4 no. 7 (September 2006)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

nature had been completed in Argentina, Australia, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Jamaica, Laos, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, The Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Uganda.<sup>70</sup> When a country's environmental crisis reaches a point at which the average available water supply per capita drops below one fourth of the global average,<sup>71</sup> breathing the air outside represents the fourth most common cause of death for citizens,<sup>72</sup> and the logistics of agricultural production become an extremely complex international project, sustainability and stability can no longer be assumed as a foregone conclusion.

However, China's domestic challenges do not stop at the environmental. Much like the rest of the industrialized world, China is simultaneously experiencing low fertility and mortality rates.<sup>73</sup> The Chinese population crisis, however, is distinct from those of Western European nations or its East Asian neighbors. This is due to three key historical episodes which are unique to China. The first was the sharp increase in mortality rates during The Great Leap Forward and its resultant diminishment of elderly, non-productive populations.<sup>74</sup> Upon this backdrop, an atypically high

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<sup>70</sup> For more on the motivations and nature of China's recent land-grabbing practices, see GRAIN, "Grain releases data set with over 400 global land grabs" (2012); KPMG. 2016. KPMG and The China Studies Centre at The University of Sydney. 2016. Demystifying Chinese investment in Australia; and Bierach, B. 2015. Who's in control? Dairy Industries International 80 (6): 16-19. [Link](#)

<sup>71</sup> Min Shao et al., "City Clusters in China: Air and Surface Water Pollution," p. 25

<sup>72</sup> Zhu Chen et al., "China Tackles the Health Effects of Air Pollution," p. 61

<sup>73</sup> Feng Wang and Andrew Mason, "Demographic Dividend and Prospects for Economic Development in China," paper prepared for *UN Expert Group Meeting on Social and Economic Implications of Changing Population Age Structures*, Mexico City, August 31-September 2, 2005

<sup>74</sup> Ibid



support ratio<sup>75</sup> was created by means of two key institutional mechanisms which guaranteed low fertility and mortality rates going forward: the former by means of the intrusive one child policy and the latter by means of a relatively successful implementation of socialist medical care programs.<sup>76</sup> The result was an enormous demographic dividend which reached its peak at the beginning of the current decade, with the effective number of producers outnumbering the effective number of consumers 1.4 to 1.<sup>77</sup> This surplus production and increased output per worker during the first demographic dividend is in large part responsible for the nation's remarkable economic growth during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, during which time real GDP per capita increased annually at upwards of 8%.<sup>78</sup>

However, as this highly productive population ages out of the workforce and becomes consumers by the end of the current decade, the Chinese economy will find itself at a crossroads. As workforce growth rates turn negative and consumers begin to outnumber producers, China will be forced to choose whether to allocate accumulated capital to care for children or for growing elderly populations.<sup>79</sup> Opting for the former will ensure continued gains in real output and GDP (and perhaps even a second demographic dividend) at the expense of the quality of life for what is soon to be the nation's largest demographic, while opting for the latter will guarantee an upheld standard of living for elderly populations while bringing real economic growth to a halt.<sup>80</sup> There

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<sup>75</sup> Ratio of producers in an economy to consumers. For more, see Andrew Mason, "Demographic Transition and Demographic Dividends in Developed and Developing Countries" (forthcoming)

<sup>76</sup> Feng Wang and Andrew Mason, "Demographic Dividend and Prospects for Economic Development in China"

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Feng Wang and Andrew Mason, "Demographic Dividend and Prospects for Economic Development in China"

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

is, however, a third option: as economists Feng Wang and Andrew Mason point out, if certain institutional measures are taken well enough in advance to prepare for the capital needs of a large, non-productive population (e.g. establishing sustainable pension programs which draw from a just-right combination of State, state-owned, and private entities),<sup>81</sup> the negative aspects of both aforementioned scenarios could possibly be avoided. However, there is at present no effort to undertake such a project, leaving the fate of the debutant superpower and the region whose economies depend on it in question.

### ***III. US-East Asia Relations and the ‘Trump Administration’***

Following the late-20th century demise of its Soviet superpower rival, the United States positioned itself as “the most powerful state in the [East Asian] region.”<sup>82</sup> Now in progress for over seventy years, the American project for liberal economic hegemony in East Asia has effectively transformed the region from a state of competing ideologies and geopolitical instability to one of productivity, regularity, and integration. However, as is the nature of all international relationships, it seems that the role of the United States as the centerpiece of economics, politics, and ideology in East Asia will not remain constant. Rightfully, this prospective inconstancy has informed scholars’ readings of regional security. In considering not only the waning of US political and economic clout in the face of trends towards regionalism but also China’s decades-long transition from cluttered and unimposing communist nation to liberal economic superstar, scholars have debated what the nature of the US’s role change in East Asia-- if there is to be one-- may look like.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “American Hegemony and East Asian Order,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58:3 (2004), pp. 353–367

Until recently, this debate was characterized by two primary competing ideas regarding what will become of the US presence in East Asia. The first scenario predicts the emergence of a Sino-American bipolar rivalry, in which the competing interests of two states with considerable regional power and influence prompts other nations to take a stance in support of either China or the United States, likely resulting in conflict.<sup>83</sup> The second suggests that bipolar tensions will likely be avoided, as US influence is gradually and peacefully eclipsed by that of China through economic and eventually cultural and institutional vehicles.<sup>84</sup> Both of these theories presented problems, however. Many believe the first scenario to be unlikely because China does not appear to be sufficiently 'dissatisfied' with the current regional structure to challenge it.<sup>85</sup> Within the context of the geopolitical regularity ostensibly afforded by US military presence and the commerce-conducive environment that this regularity provides, they argue, China has been able to carry out its economic and diplomatic agenda practically unhindered.<sup>86</sup> Doubt also exists surrounding the feasibility of the second scenario, as it would necessitate an acceptance of Chinese hegemony on the part of its East Asian neighbors as well as willing agreement from the US to retract its reach across the Pacific.<sup>87</sup>

The true end result likely lies somewhere between these two ideas in that the latter scenario would have triggered the former over time. Though the US briefly became the largest trading

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<sup>83</sup> G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003)

<sup>84</sup> Ikenberry, "American Hegemony and East Asian Order," p. 359

<sup>85</sup> Steve Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory* (London, Routledge, 2008), p. ix

<sup>86</sup> Ikenberry, "American Hegemony and East Asian Order," pp. 359-60

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

partner for ASEAN countries in the late 1990s,<sup>88</sup> US trade efforts in Southeast Asia have since been eclipsed by Chinese business, as the second scenario predicted. As of June 2016, the United States had slipped to the position of ASEAN's third largest trading partner, representing only 9.3% of regional trade versus China's 15.2%.<sup>89</sup> This trend of economic sidelining prompted the US and friends to attempt to reiterate the US's power and influence in the region via various initiatives including the Obama Administration's 'Pivot to Asia' program, the ill-fated Trans-Pacific Partnership, and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's recent diplomatic/aide dispersal tour of nations who have been the target of Chinese capital projects in recent years.<sup>90</sup> While these sorts of maneuvers only constitute soft balancing at most, it is crucial that they be read as purposeful efforts to shore up relations with a number of countries who seem to have drifted towards team China,<sup>91</sup> representing a primitive form of the type of division into 'regional coalitions' prescribed by the bipolar rivalry scenario.<sup>92</sup>

Such was the way the US-China power transition was headed prior to November 8, 2016. Had this scenario been able to continue the way it was, it is likely that as US economic and political power waned further, increased balancing measures would be implemented in order to contain Chinese prosperity and ensure the solvency of the United States' position in the region, resulting in Chinese dissatisfaction/calls for Chinese revisionism to the regional order, exacerbation of the division of neighboring countries into pro-US or pro-China camps, and eventually conflict.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> ASEAN Statistics, "Top ten ASEAN trade partner countries/regions" (ASEAN Statistics, 2016) [Link](#)

<sup>90</sup> Martin Petty, "Japan's Abe visits Philippines as Duterte's first top guest" (Reuters, 2017) [Link](#)

<sup>91</sup> Duterte

<sup>92</sup> Ikenberry and Mastanduno

However, since November 8, 2016 and the election of Mr. Donald Trump to the office of US President, we have been ushered into a new era of US-East Asia relations in which discussion of soft balancing against China, Power-Transition Theory, and disparities between the United States' and China's participation in the Southeast Asian market might not even matter anymore. Instead, we are now faced with a far more unpredictable situation characterized not only by these same economic and diplomatic insecurities, but also a number of far more exigent and disquieting problems caused by the new administration's propensity towards the needless agitation of delicate geopolitical situations whose climaxes observers have dreaded for decades.

The first several months of the 45th US presidential administration have already brought an instance of flippant departure from longstanding, carefully crafted US-China diplomatic precedent in the form of a victory phone call to Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen, the immediate dismantling of the TPP and with it any hopes of more robust trade relations between the United States and the ASEAN market, and a false promise of an imminent full-scale naval assault on North Korea, resulting in the mobilization of 150,000 Chinese troops (the largest military mobilization in the region since the conclusion of the Cold War) to the North Korean border in anticipation of an unprecedented refugee crisis.<sup>93 94 95</sup> These episodes, compounded by the current president's staunch anti-China rhetoric whilst campaigning as well as mounting worries in American political and media settings regarding Chinese cyber espionage against the United

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<sup>93</sup> Guy Taylor, "Groundbreaking phone call with Donald Trump raises hopes, fears in Taiwan" (*The Washington Times*, 2017)

<sup>94</sup> Peter Baker, "Trump abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's signature trade deal" (*The New York Times*, 2017)

<sup>95</sup> Alex Lockie, "China sends 150,000 troops to North Korea's Border" (*The New York Times*, 2017).

States,<sup>96 97</sup> should give pause to scholars hoping to evaluate the future (or even the current status) of the US presence in East Asia.

Beyond the US-China question, strong rhetoric from both Japan (in the form of the LDP's recent volition to amend Article 9 of the nation's postwar constitution)<sup>98</sup> and the US (in the form of complaints of budgetary inequity)<sup>99</sup> on the subject of a potential revision or restructuring of the US-Japanese military alliance presents questions regarding the future of the 'American security umbrella' responsible in large part for the region's economic success.<sup>100</sup> Given the unprecedented shift represented by the current US administration's choices in Asia-oriented policy, it appears that the US-East Asia relationship may be entering uncharted territory. Being that there is no clear, recent precedent to indicate what happens when a regional hegemon of the same magnitude of The United States begins demonstrating symptoms of political economic volatility and diplomatic unpredictability, it is hard to say in exactly what direction the US-East Asia relationship might head in the coming years. Much like China's internal situation, however, this volatility and unpredictability has a clear import in terms of analyzing prospects for peace and conflict in East Asia. Inasmuch as the character of the current US administration's policy towards Asia represents a dramatic rupture with post-WWII precedent, any optimistic analysis conducted under the assumption of the continuation of such a precedent loses validity and must be readdressed.

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<sup>96</sup> Amy Goodman, "During campaign Trump accused China of 'raping our country,' today he hosts Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago" (Democracy Now!, 2017).

<sup>97</sup> DD Wu, "Anti-espionage: A new mass line campaign in China?" (*The Diplomat*, 2017).

<sup>98</sup> Kyodo, "Trump urges Japan to pay more to maintain U.S. military bases" (*The Japan Times*, 2017)

<sup>99</sup> Kyodo, "Japanese sharply divided over revising Article 9 amid regional security threats" (*The Japan Times*, 2017)

<sup>100</sup> Ikenberry, "American Hegemony and East Asian Order," pp. 359-60

## Conclusion

East Asia's transformation following the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be reduced to three principle phenomena. The first is the economic and political ascent of environmentally and economically precarious China and the reorganization of market and political structures its rise catalyzed. The second is the decisive swing of East Asian public discourse away from China's favor as a result of China's opaque internal strategies and aggressive economic and geopolitical behaviors. The third is the onset of economic and diplomatic volatility vis-à-vis the role of the region's decades-long hegemon, the United States. When regarded as an ensemble, nothing about these phenomena seem to indicate that East Asian international relations will remain pacific through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although predicting exactly what the nature of an eventual East Asian conflict may be is difficult, we may at least be able to point to a number of situations which may potentially serve as the context for or even catalyze conflict. Perhaps most pertinent is the dramatic uptick in unfavorable sentiment towards China observed among East Asians over the past decade and a half. Being that such attitudes and the tensions they inspire have consistently mounted in recent years, it is reasonable to imagine that these attitudes and anxieties will eventually bleed into East Asian nations' policy decisions regarding China.

This kind of discourse-to-policy transformation would not be without precedent. The contemporary Japanese effort towards remilitarization demonstrates perfectly well the ability of public sentiment to inform policy efforts. Only thirty years ago, any mention of 'military,' 'alliance,' or 'rearmament' in Japanese discourse represented a taboo of the highest order.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> For mention of postwar Japanese military taboo, see Martin E. Weinstein, *Japan's Postwar Defense Policy, 1947–1968* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971) p. 160.

Following the economic crisis of 1991, however, many disenfranchised Japanese youth took on stark ethno-nationalist<sup>102</sup> or otherwise militaristic tendencies as an effort to push back against the globalist forces they felt reduced their national society and economy to a “mountain of rubble.”<sup>103</sup> Since then, the notion of Japanese nationalism and rearmament became normalized little by little, leading Japan to a point only two decades after entering recession at which the revision of Article 9 is being discussed by LDP officials.

Aside from the tendency to unjustly reject IR theory as it applies to East Asia, perhaps the most substantial shortfall of ‘optimistic’ analyses from the last twenty-some years is their failure to account for these discursive factors. While these kinds of ideas and attitudes typically begin in the realm of ‘fringe’ thought, as the example of Japanese nationalism/rearmament demonstrates, their ability to pervade the collective consciousness over time and ultimately inform policy needs to be taken into account in discussion of international relations. Pointing exclusively to bureaucratic channels and ‘state’ activity as a sufficient indicator of ‘opinion’ or ‘sentiment’ (à la David Shambaugh) is not enough as it neglects the existence of new *mass* opinions that form beneath the lid of bureaucracy and state. What I propose instead is effort within IR study towards sensitization towards emerging trends in public sentiment and ideology, the understanding of such ideologies’ contextual logic and means of propagation, and possible effects that could be observed should such ideologies reach a level of prevalence such that they begin to inform policy. Without

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<sup>102</sup> \*MORI Yoshitaka, “The Pitfall Facing the Cool Japan Project: The Transnational Development of the Anime Industry under the Condition of Post-Fordism\*” *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* (2011) Number 20: 30-42.

<sup>103</sup> Amamiya Karin, “Suffering Causes Us to Think Beyond the Right-Left Barrier,” and Jodi Beck, “Translator’s Introduction,” *Mechademia*, Vol. 5: 251-266.



such an understanding of the workings of public discourse and its influence on policy, it seems that international relations as a discipline will only experience more 'surprises' like East Asia.

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