

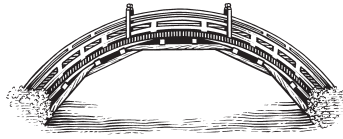
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

David C. Kang

*China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia*

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## Power, Interest, and Identity: Reviving the Sinocentric Hierarchy in East Asia

*Evelyn Goh*

Though the rise of China has spurred a marked increase in publications on East Asian politics and international relations (IR), many scholars have continued to wrestle with the challenge of how to develop studies that are empirically accurate and interesting as well as conceptually rigorous. Broadly three fault-lines divide the field of East Asian IR: the first separates country-specific studies and studies of subregions or the region as a whole, the second separates analyses of foreign policy and studies that develop generalizable theories, and the third separates studies that test general Western theories in an Asian context and the smaller number of studies that attempt to develop “indigenous” theories.<sup>1</sup> *China Rising* is David Kang’s valiant attempt to traverse all three divides. Combining impressive coverage of wide-ranging empirical material—history, culture, policymaking motivations, processes, and interactions—with conceptual innovation, Kang has made an important contribution to the growing enterprise of “eclectic” theorizing in international relations.<sup>2</sup>

*China Rising* investigates the reactions of China’s neighbors in East Asia to Beijing’s rising power and influence. Kang’s answer to the puzzle posed by Western IR theories of why East Asian states are not balancing against China is that these states do not fear China. Kang advances a twofold explanation for this lack of fear. The first explanation is derived both from his demonstration that East Asia is a historically hierarchical system centered on China and from the intuitively compelling claim that “there is a logic of hierarchy that can lead, and has led, to a stable, relatively peaceful hierarchical international system under (early) modern conditions” in 1300–1900 (p. 49). The second explanation is that, rather than focusing on China’s growing power per se,

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<sup>1</sup> On the latter, see, for instance, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., “Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (September 2007): 287–312.

<sup>2</sup> See J.J. Suh, Peter Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

regional states are each preoccupied with key challenges and threats arising fundamentally from identity conflicts.

*China Rising* possesses three significant strengths. First, within what remains a Euro- and American-centric discipline, the book challenges some core simplistic and simplifying assumptions regarding the nature and impact of China's contemporary rise by developing the theory of East Asian hierarchical propensity in international relations.<sup>3</sup> Second, as the first systematic study of East Asian reactions to China's rise, the book successfully reminds us that power is relational. Furthermore, in emphasizing the ideational aspects of the accommodative power dynamic in the region, Kang also underscores the grave difficulties inherent in theorizing on threats, an endeavor that is less common than one might expect in the study of international relations. Clearly, geographical proximity and military capability are insufficient explanatory variables in East Asian reactions to China's rise. Kang's suggestion that this lack of fear resulting both from a historical propensity toward hierarchical regional order and from a preoccupation with other conflicts also leaves room for the development of more generalizable hypotheses. Third, the book is valuable for its explicit focus on the states of East Asia other than the great powers. In privileging identity considerations in explaining these states' accommodation toward China, Kang shows that power disparity and distribution are insufficient for explaining the complex choices that these states face in assessing options for balancing, aligning, or even transitioning to great-power status.

Providing an empirically rich study that examines not only China's rise but also the reasons for the reactions of China's neighbors large and small, Kang has managed to weave together disparate strands in contemporary East Asian international relations. He infuses this account with an understanding of historical context, domestic political considerations in the different states, and the role of the United States in the region. Yet the contributions of this book could have been even greater if the conceptual framework had been more thoroughly developed. As it stands, some explanatory gaps and more than a few tantalizing questions remain.

My main critique lies with the way in which Kang operationalizes identity as his explanatory variable. Identity is defined broadly as "a set of unifying ideas that focus primarily on how a nation perceives the world around it and its place within it" (p. 9). This concept is used in unspecified and different ways

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<sup>3</sup> The theory is set out in more detail in David Kang, "Hierarchy and Stability in Asian International Relations," in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastaduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 166–68.

throughout the book. In fact one can conceive of the application of identity variables on three levels. At the regional-system level East Asia constitutes a region because it has been shaped by a shared hierarchical, Sinocentric history. As such East Asian countries share an implied regional world-view that is also Sinocentric and that sees a strong, dominant China as “natural” and “good.” Second, China’s identity is the critical variable in both contemporary and historical East Asian international relations. At this level Kang argues that the concern for sovereignty and lack of territorial ambition that mark the current identity of the Chinese state, coupled with Beijing’s grand strategy emphasizing peaceful rise, cooperation, and multilateralism, render China benign to its neighbors. Finally, the identities and identity crises of the other East Asian states are the most important level on which the absence of these states’ balancing against China is explained.

The main problem with Kang’s analysis of identity at the regional level is that he dangles the juicy carrot of the Sinocentric hierarchy idea but then drops this idea after chapter 2. Although Sinocentric hierarchy is supposed to explain partially regional states’ lack of fear of China, there is no systematic attempt to relate these states’ current preferences and behavior to hierarchical dynamics. The analysis would have been more powerful if Kang had demonstrated that in the contemporary period what is taking place in East Asia is a reconstitution of the logic of Sinocentric hierarchy—based on the dynamics of relative material and ideational power, size, historical relations, and complex sets of revitalized norms centered on the relational identities among various states in the regional hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> One methodological consequence of this underdevelopment of the concept of Sinocentric hierarchy is that Kang misses the opportunity to advance understanding of how China has managed to perform preemptive hegemonic reassurance beyond the standard account of restrained Chinese grand strategy and active diplomacy. In other words, to demonstrate the reconstitution of a Sinocentric regional hierarchy, one would need to elucidate the interactive processes by which China, on the one hand, has introduced new norms and understandings that regulate their power relations, and by which its neighbors, on the other hand, have reacted to China’s efforts by acceptance, negotiation, or resistance. If Kang’s hierarchy thesis is correct, then it would be worth explicitly locating or contextualizing China’s East Asian endeavors within this hierarchical tradition, distinguishing

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<sup>4</sup> For such an analysis and the argument that the contemporary East Asian hierarchy has been U.S.-centered since 1945, see Evelyn Goh, “Hegemony and Hierarchy: The Role of the United States in the East Asian Security Order” (forthcoming, 2009).

China's position and identity in East Asia (and therefore reactions to this position and identity) from elsewhere in the world.

On China, Kang tends to simplify the dilemma that other states face regarding China's rise as being concerned with identity rather than with power (p. 103). In a way, this view is the old constructivist adage that what matters is not how many missiles a state possesses but rather which particular state possesses the missiles.<sup>5</sup> Yet as Kang also acknowledges, identity is not immutable. Thus we may expect China's identity, and consequently its policy preferences as well, to change over time and in interaction with a variety of endogenous and exogenous factors, including growing material capability and ideational influence. Rather than returning to the tired dichotomy between capabilities and intentions, it would be more useful to investigate how identity, interest, and power are mutually constituted. A scenario in which China democratizes rapidly constitutes one example: if the theory that states in rapid democratic transition are more prone to start wars is correct, then such a significant alteration to the domestic political system might have serious repercussions for China's foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

The main contribution of the book is Kang's analysis of East Asian states' reactions to China's rise. At this level the identity variable works best in the cases of Taiwan and Japan, because the core national interests of both countries involve issues of existential and ontological security and choice. In the case of Taiwan, the conflict between Taiwan and China essentially concerns whether Taiwan is an independent nation-state or an inalienable province of mainland China. In the case of Japan, the unresolved conundrum of whether, how, and to what extent Japan ought to become a "normal" country has stymied both potentially positive and potentially negative developments in regional relations, including the extent of reconciliation or conflict with China and the degree and direction of reform to the Japanese alliance with the United States.

The underspecified identity variable does not work well for South Korea. South Korea's core national interest is unification with the North, and the more urgent national security threat to South Korea is Japan. Kang explains the latter by contrasting the long history of stable relations Seoul has maintained with China with South Korea's more recent, conflictual history with Japan and the United States, especially after the Cold War. Yet the

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<sup>5</sup> For one classic articulation, see Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391–425.

<sup>6</sup> See Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War," *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 297–337.

main work of explaining why the Republic of Korea (ROK) is increasingly aligning with, rather than balancing against, China is done by a rationalist account. Rather than by identification with China per se, the ROK has aligned with the power that possesses the most influence on the twin issues deeply important to Seoul: reunification with North Korea and economic growth. Indeed both the ROK and China are fundamentally relying on the United States to restrain Japan.<sup>7</sup>

If South Korea is the “paradigmatic” case (p. 55), then Southeast Asia is the “easy” case in *China Rising*. Small states are supposed to bandwagon with the most profitable, or the least threatening, great power.<sup>8</sup> Thus Kang has undertaken the challenging task of showing that Southeast Asian states not only were rolling over into the China sphere of influence out of deference to power asymmetries but additionally that these states also were accommodating China for reasons having to do with identity. Although showing a determination to label China not as a threat but as an opportunity, the catalogue Kang cites of increasing political and economic engagement and multilateralism does not explain how identity comes to bear. Ultimately Southeast Asian states share a very limited common identity, exhibit a range of attitudes and latitude of choice vis-à-vis China, and have a well-developed regional security strategy toward managing all the greater powers in the region—and not toward just China in isolation. Indeed looking at Southeast Asian strategies, one might argue that—in contrast to Kang’s claim (p. 8)—balance-of-power politics have been practiced against China by Southeast Asian states, just not in a way the neo-realists that Kang wants to sideline can explain.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear how Kang’s identity explanation adds to our understanding of Southeast Asian reactions to China. His analysis also risks dismissing the significance of material disputes, such as the competing claims over the South China Sea, because these disputes concern power, not identity. The dispute over the South China

<sup>7</sup> See Suh, Katzenstein, and Carlson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia*, especially J.J. Suh, “Bound to Last? The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Analytical Eclecticism,” 150–64. Indeed Suh argues that mutual identification between the United States and the ROK explains the durability of the alliance. For useful discussions of the less attractive alternatives to the U.S. alliance, see Nicholas Eberstadt et al., “A World without the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Thinking about ‘Alternative Futures,’” The National Bureau of Asian Research, Conference Report, October 2007 ~ [http://www.nbr.org/programs/northeast/Conference\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nbr.org/programs/northeast/Conference_Report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72–107; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); and David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/5): 64–99.

<sup>9</sup> See Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 113–57.

Sea is far from resolved and remains one key test case for measuring China's intentions in the region.

In spite of these limitations *China Rising* is an important book because Kang takes up the challenge of addressing a much-discussed topic from an explicitly regional perspective and through a theory of East Asian international relations. This book is additionally useful because it revives interest in the fundamental problem of how to theorize power, interest, and identity. *China Rising* thus should spur other scholars of East Asian IR toward work that can overcome the dichotomy between foreign policy and international relations theory and place East Asian IR at the forefront of challenging and extending IR theories.

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### Shifting the Burden of Proof

*Ellen L. Frost*

Is it possible that East Asia is constructing a new kind of regional order, one that will teach us something about how to govern ourselves in a fluid, post-Cold War strategic environment? Not a chance, say the skeptics: Asia will remain potentially unstable because Asian leaders would rather issue meaningless communiqués than yield a centimeter of sovereignty. Moreover, China's long-term intentions are unknown and possibly destabilizing, Sino-Japanese tensions are still raw, and the Southeast Asian states are weak and divided. In short, East Asia is not a coherent region, let alone a model of order. Only the United States can provide the glue that cements stability, and that glue is military power; everything else is rhetoric. Or so many hard-nosed "realists" would argue.

Are the last twenty years or more merely a fluke then? For despite local flare-ups and moments of tension, Asia has been stable, peaceful, and increasingly prosperous. Equally remarkable, Asians seem to be peacefully

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digesting one of the defining strategic developments of our era—the resurgence of a powerful China.

This stability calls for an explanation. Doesn't a rising power always disrupt the regional order? After all consider what happened when Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany and later imperial Japan began flexing their muscles. Now it is China's turn. According to one version of traditional international relations theory, we should expect that Beijing will seek to use China's growing power to expand the country's territorial reach. Asian countries are already facing a choice between joining the China bandwagon or hedging against China by strengthening and deepening military ties with the United States. Either way, Asia is bound to become less stable.

Not so, argues David Kang in *China Rising*. Challenging this rendition of balance-of-power theory on factual grounds, Kang asserts that proponents of the theory derive their conclusions from European history, not from Asia's own experience. He rejects John Mearsheimer's dictum that "China cannot rise peacefully...Most of China's neighbors...will likely join with the United States to contain China's power."<sup>1</sup> More important than power itself, Kang argues, is what states want to do with such power and how they shape those intentions. Not every state wants to acquire territory from its neighbors; some states inherit self-images and attitudes that predispose them toward peaceful behavior. On these issues Kang sympathizes less with proponents of balance-of-power theory and more with scholars who emphasize such factors as memory, perceptions, beliefs, and intentions. What Kang desires, however, is to bring an end to "seemingly endless paradigmatic debates" (p. 9)—presumably those between "realists" and "constructivists"—by looking at the actual facts associated with China's rise and then modifying international relations theory accordingly.

To make this connection between facts and theory, Kang repeatedly spells out his methodology. Starting with an extensively researched survey of the history of China's relations with its near neighbors, Kang sets up an interpretive model that blends pragmatic interests and identity. By "identity" he means the combination of interaction and narratives that defines a nation's place in a region and that shapes a nation's definition of national interest. These concepts of interest and identity explain the mostly stable regional order that prevailed in Asia from roughly the year 1300 to 1900.

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<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski and John J. Mearsheimer, "Clash of the Titans," *Foreign Policy*, no. 146 (January/February 2005): 4, quoted in David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press), 8.



Kang draws on the same six centuries of history to support his argument that East Asia's past is a better guide to the region's future than Europe's past. Compared to Europe, East Asia was historically both more stable and more hierarchical—and these two features, Kang argues, were related. Even when China was militarily strong, Chinese troops rarely invaded the country's neighbors.<sup>2</sup> Today, China's strength is an asset: the greatest threat to U.S. interests comes from a weak state, North Korea (p. 195). Likewise, a weak China would pose a greater threat to both Asian and U.S. interests than would a prosperous and confident China. If Kang were of a mind to compose four-character Chinese slogans, one would be “Strong China, Stable Region.”

Although Japan might be expected to attempt to balance China, Kang argues that historically Japan has only challenged or invaded China when China was weak. Postwar Japan has not challenged the United States either. After six decades of close relations with Washington, Tokyo is not in a position to exercise regional leadership. This unfulfilled role is due in part, Kang argues, to the fact that Japan's identity is still unresolved (p. 181).

Kang puts an interesting twist on the legacy of the China-centered tribute system. He has argued implicitly in this book and explicitly in person elsewhere that the system rested on formal inequality but de facto equality in the sense that tributary states remained free. As long as these tributaries did what was expected at the Chinese court, China largely left them alone. Today, by contrast, Asian nations are formally equal, but the fact that China has risen to the top of the hierarchy of influence creates de facto inequality.

Kang's emphasis on the tribute system has already provoked discussion among scholars. In a 2003/04 article in *International Security*, Amitav Acharya credited Kang with breaking the link between Europe's past and Asia's future.<sup>3</sup> Yet Acharya also characterized as “confusing and dangerous” Kang's notion that Asia is returning to a culturally comfortable hierarchical order. Asia's future will not resemble its past. Instead, according to Acharya, Asians are now coping with insecurity through “shared regional norms, rising economic interdependence, and growing institutional linkages.”<sup>4</sup> These are new features of the Asian landscape, not warmed-over remnants of history. Disputing

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<sup>2</sup> Kang carries his interest in Asian diplomatic history several steps further in a recent draft article. For example, he contrasts the relative stability of historical relations among Sinicized states with the frequently violent interaction between China and various nomadic peoples to the north, then seeks to explain the difference. David Kang, “War and Identity in Early Modern East Asia” (unpublished manuscript, 2008). Cited with permission of the author.

<sup>3</sup> See Amitav Acharya, “Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?” *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/04): 149–64. The article on which Acharya is commenting is David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 57–85.

<sup>4</sup> Acharya, “Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?” 164.

Kang's version of Chinese military history, Acharya further adds that India, which is outside of Kang's framework, is attempting to balance China.<sup>5</sup>

To this reader, the contrast between Kang and Acharya is not absolute. Indeed Kang's book cites with approval Acharya's emphasis on regional identity (p. 8), and in a more recent article Acharya returns the compliment by citing in his list of challenges to the American "imperium" Kang's vision of a Sino-centric regional order that "revives the tradition of economic exchange and geopolitical practices of the old tributary system."<sup>6</sup>

Although Kang's main target is international relations theory, his conclusions are highly relevant to U.S. foreign policy. For example, *China Rising* rebuts the notion that other Asian countries fear China. Kang also casts serious doubt on the idea that U.S. power "reassures" these countries and thus downgrades somewhat (though not entirely) the argument for U.S. military presence in East Asia. As a typical representation of Asian perceptions of U.S. power, Kang quotes a Malaysian newspaper that "There is no guarantee that a U.S. presence means a U.S. commitment to safeguard the security of every nation in this region" (p. 194). At the same time, he acknowledges that virtually every government in the region, including China's, wants the U.S. Pacific Command to remain deployed in East Asia. This reviewer would add that most governments also seem eager to enhance their own military capabilities by participating in or observing U.S.-sponsored joint exercises, training, and education.

*China Rising* is refreshingly easy to read. Kang's prose is muscular and concise. His underlying tone conveys a sense both of urgency and of good-humored frustration. He brings fresh air to stale topics; for example at one point Kang observes that if the "history" disputes between Japan, China, and South Korea actually concerned history, the solution would be simple: "just find better historians and archaeologists" (p. 170). In addition, Kang's methodology is explicit and consistent. Determined to leave no academic stone unturned, Kang summarizes a vast amount of research, piling up one quote after another like a prosecuting attorney. Despite his hammer-like logic and voluminous research, with this book Kang has put himself out on a conceptual limb, and it is evident from his careful sourcing that he expects to hear a sawing sound from those who disagree with him.

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<sup>5</sup> Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?" 150–51.

<sup>6</sup> Amitav Acharya, "The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics," *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (July 2007): 644. The term "American imperium" was coined by Peter J. Katzenstein and signifies the combination of America's territorial and non-territorial power. For his pioneering book, see Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

As Kang's thinking evolves, I hope that he will devote more attention to the political consequences of deeper and closer economic relations with China (pp. 66–67). China has emerged as the number one or number two trading partner of virtually every country in East Asia. From the perspective of any one of those countries, this trade dependence with China is asymmetrical because China possesses all the leverage. This worries some experts in the U.S. military community. I argue elsewhere, however, that despite this asymmetry economic dependence is in fact mutual. Though any trade partner may be expendable, China is dependent on other Asian countries as a group to supply materials and parts, facilitate technology transfer, and create wealth and influence, thereby bolstering the government's legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> This mutuality is quite consistent with Kang's views.

Adding to a growing scholarly interest in regions as pillars of global order, Kang's thesis should stimulate fundamental questions regarding the complex interaction between the global system, the behavior of regional powers, and local responses. This reviewer came away from the book persuaded more firmly than ever that East Asian countries have developed a regional order that is both stable and sufficiently flexible to adapt to—and influence—a rising China. The burden of proof has now shifted to those who argue that Asia's stability is fleeting.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen L. Frost, *Asia's New Regionalism* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 165–66.

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## Balancing Identity and Reality

*Christopher P. Twomey*

In *China Rising* David Kang advances two claims—one empirical, one causal—that challenge the core tenets of classic international relations theory. First, Kang argues that East Asian states are in fact accommodating rather than balancing China. Second, he argues that this behavior is a result of the

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specific conceptions of identity in China and her neighbors (p. 4). These arguments have critical importance for U.S. foreign policy in the region, as Kang rightly emphasizes in his conclusion. By arguing that the very nature of international interaction is specific to the culture of the actors, *China Rising* constitutes a formidable broadside against important strains in international relations literature.

Admirable for its clarity and for its timely attention both to the peculiarities of Asian international affairs and to Beijing's role in the region, *China Rising* nevertheless suffers from three main weaknesses: first, the book neglects detailed analysis of the core tools of hard balancing; second, the proposed causal argument not only fails in important cases but also neglects important alternate explanations; third, the evaluation of identity in *China Rising* falls short of the high standard established by other works in the constructivist tradition.

Kang's empirical claim possesses some verisimilitude but is oversimplified. Kang correctly observes that Asian states are not engaged in containment of China. Such a sweeping statement, however, illuminates little of importance regarding contemporary Asian security affairs. In a helpful chart (p. 55) Kang disaggregates the region, sketching a wide range of behavior toward China: North Korea is actively bandwagoning with China, while Taiwan is balancing against Beijing; Vietnam and Malaysia are leaning toward North Korea's strategy, while Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines are following Taiwan in balancing against China. More often, however, Kang coats the region with a veneer of consistency that minimizes the importance of national differences. The nuanced view of relations toward China afforded by the chart is valuable, and indeed justifying the chart's coding and explaining such wide variation would serve the field well.

Doing so, however, would have required a more explicit focus on the metrics by which balancing policy is judged. Kang wisely steers away from incorporating "soft balancing" in his appraisal of Asian policy; such a concept is notably hard to evaluate systematically and objectively. Nonetheless, a richer discussion of how to array security policy is warranted in a book on "hard balancing." Though "military buildups and defense spending, or countervailing military alliances aimed at an adversary" (p. 52), do capture the broadest level of such behavior, a more exhaustive discussion would have considered the composition of military forces and a wider range of alignment patterns. Specifically, shifts in the make-up of military forces can conceal balancing attempts within a fixed budget. Thus, Kang's emphasis on cuts in Japanese ground forces obscures a shift in Japanese capabilities that

are militarily relevant to China.<sup>1</sup> The reinvigoration of the U.S.-Japan alliance that began in the late 1990s is clearly, if quietly, aimed at China (as is well understood in Beijing). Similarly, China's occupation and militarization of Mischief Reef in 1995 was the turning point in U.S.-Philippine relations—not the later increase in the salience of the threat of terrorism to U.S. interests.<sup>2</sup> A more nuanced discussion of the core tools of hard balancing—military capabilities and variations in alignment patterns—would have complicated further the sweeping assertion that “East Asian states are not balancing China” (p. 4) and would have called attention to the wide variation in those nations' policies toward the Middle Kingdom.

Whether or not one accepts these empirical critiques, Kang's causal argument fails in two ways. First, Kang's correct statement that the United States lacks an Asian identity (p. 187) implies that the United States is not subject to the same culturally derived predisposition that leads true “Asian” states to “accept, rather than fear, China's expected emergence as a powerful and perhaps the dominant state in East Asia” (pp. 197–98). If that is the case, why is the United States not balancing against China more (p. 189–92)? The answer is of course that China's intentions are ambiguous and the spiraling dangers of the security dilemma lead the United States to hedge as other Asian nations have done.<sup>3</sup> Asian identity needs not play any role in such an explanation.

Second, Kang neglects careful consideration of two core material factors: power ratios and geography. It is a standard prediction of realism that small states tend toward bandwagoning.<sup>4</sup> That some small states fight back when invaded (e.g., Iraq and Afghanistan), find great power patrons and involuntarily host proxy wars (e.g., Vietnam), or are difficult to pacify after conquest does not systematically undermine this realist prediction, as Kang purports is the case (pp. 10, 192). Furthermore, the “stopping power of water”

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases Kang does take a more fine-grained approach to military power; see the discussion of South Korea (p. 56) in particular. In other cases, more attention is needed; see, for example, the discussion of the Taiwan military balance (p. 98).

<sup>2</sup> Kang's own chronology on p. 139 suggests this. Other cases of alignment policy that would have benefited from a more detailed and systematic analysis are Japan in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 170) and Singapore (p. 62 and pp. 193–94).

<sup>3</sup> This reviewer would characterize the policies of several Asian nations more as hedging rather than as accommodation relative to Kang's coding. In other places I have criticized U.S. policy as being too much aimed at balancing. See Christopher P. Twomey, “Missing Strategic Opportunity in U.S. China Policy since 9/11: Grasping Tactical Success,” *Asian Survey* 47, no.4 (July/August 2007): 536–59. The issue of contention here, however, is not the empirical characterization of policy but rather—given the substantial difference in identity, Kang's core independent variable—the lack of more widely divergent policy between the United States and the Asian states.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

(and long distance) greatly impedes the projection of power across seas and oceans for all but the most lopsided dyads.<sup>5</sup> These factors account for much of the variation in East Asian states' balancing against China. Thus, Japan and Taiwan benefit from moats and so can engage in the most robust competition with China of any state in Kang's sample. Geographic contiguity, by contrast, curses Vietnam and Korea and forces both countries to cozy up to China. Singapore, miniscule in power terms but far away from China, can turn to the United States by hosting a major U.S. Navy command and tailoring a harbor to the United States' most capable power projection asset, Nimitz-class supercarriers.<sup>6</sup> These factors explain the variation in Kang's cases. Were Asian identity the paramount factor in explaining this variation, Taiwan and Singapore would be the most tolerant of China's rise given shared cultural roots with the mainland.

Constructivism in general has enjoyed considerable success in challenging core tenets of the international relations literature.<sup>7</sup> Constructivist literature is typically rather modest in terms of causal claims and is diligent in its rigor. It problematizes the sources and repositories of culture. It recognizes the importance of cultural malleability and change. It appreciates the multiplicities of competing themes in any national culture. Furthermore, much of constructivist literature is meticulous in its methodology for characterizing identity, typically drawing on an intensive, sociological approach to this challenging concept. In these respects, *China Rising* does not live up to the promise of the broader literature within which the book is situated.<sup>8</sup>

Kang does at times delve into the sociological sources of identity (the South Korean case is strongest, see p. 107–09). More often, however, Kang's actual coding of national identity derives from a range of other factors, each with limitations. Polling is fickle and not optimized for measuring deeply

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<sup>5</sup> The term is from John J. Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Making the same geographic point is Robert S. Ross in "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 81–118.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Anne L. Clunan, *Reconstructing Grandeur: Identity and the Sources of Russian Security Policy* (forthcoming, 2009); Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Neta C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, that at times Kang makes clear he is aware of these issues (see, for example, pp. 21, 49, 81, 83, and 103).

held ideas concerning the nature of international relations. Domestic politics should be separated from, not conflated with, cultural identity (for instance see the Japan case on p. 182). Likewise, the relationship between economic ties and identity can be mutually constitutive or epiphenomenal. The Chinese leadership, for example, has a political need for rapid economic growth (p. 85), and this need certainly has important implications for Beijing's foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> Yet, it would be wrong to locate that preference in a culturally derived Chinese identity.

Similarly, in *China Rising* Kang is aspiring to a characterization of an intersubjective identity that might shape international relations in the way Alexander Wendt has outlined.<sup>10</sup> The preponderance of the characterizations of identity in the book, however, concerns a nation's self-identification. This approach is more consistent with work by constructivists such as Hopf.<sup>11</sup> Such a disjuncture between the independent and dependent variable at least requires explication: the way that the self-identity of individual nations shapes the nature of the international system they constitute is not axiomatic.

Identity is a challenging concept to evaluate with rigor. An ethnographic, anthropologic approach to international relations has much promise, and indeed Kang is right to draw his reader's attention to the merits of this approach. Such an approach may also have important implications for the study of East Asia in particular. *China Rising* serves as an important starting point for such work.

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<sup>9</sup> Although, again highlighting a potentially fickle area, many worry about the prospect that a xenophobic nationalism might be substituted for economic growth as a means to legitimize China's failing authoritarian government.

<sup>10</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

<sup>11</sup> Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*.

## Applied Constructivism Rising

*Jalal Alamgir*

Hegemonic transition—the eclipse of one superpower by another—makes for dangerous times, especially when seen from the conventional approach to international relations that informs many U.S. academic and policy circles. David Kang’s *China Rising* is a welcome, persuasive, and iconoclastic intervention into that discourse.

With both elegance and clarity, Kang shows that China’s rise has been “peaceful”—and starkly so when compared to the belligerence that has been endemic to the West since the Middle Ages. China’s interest is squarely to ensure that this peace and stability remains by and large undisturbed. The odds are good: reasoning that there is more to be gained from accommodation than from balancing and confrontation, countries in East and Southeast Asia have come to accept China’s rise.

Though this argument by itself would have made a solid book, Kang admirably goes beyond. In fact, his most significant contribution is in delineating not interests but the ideas and norms that underpin states’ interpretations of interests. Debunking the notion that interests derive primarily from calculations of power and capabilities, Kang argues lucidly that East Asia’s accommodation of China’s rise is based on a history of sanguine perceptions of China’s role in the region and on centuries of China’s ideational and institutional influence.

The emphasis on the role of ideas is provocative first of all for its academic import: Kang’s work is an excellent showcase of what may be termed “applied constructivism.” This focus is also provocative, however, from a policy perspective. Even though the embrace of rational positivism became identifiable as a quintessentially American approach to studying international relations, policy analysis in the West, especially in the United States, is marked by a struggle to underplay identity. Rational positivism’s lure of objective criteria that can assess interests and draw unbiased conclusions sits uncomfortably with its own ideational edifices, which—in both realist and liberal variants—highlight confrontation.

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U.S. policy, for example, continues to construct Islamism as a civilizational tendency defined and situated primarily by the relation of Islamism to the West rather than by the complex relation of Islamism to its own adherents. Oppositional terms dominate the discourse, and the mainstream intellectual current in U.S. foreign policy is unable to entertain Islamism—whether in Iran, Turkey, or Indonesia—as anything but confrontational. Misperceptions are common by-products.

Kang's analysis of China offers a corrective to the analytic lenses of mainstream international relations theory. China's rise is one of the core concerns of U.S. foreign policy; however, this phenomenon is a concern primarily because of a portrayal of China in oppositional terms, ranging from conflicting values to conflicting interests and everything in between. By articulating the role of ideas, norms, and identity, applied research in the line of Kang's work promises to offer alternatives to oppositional terms, and as a result, one hopes, may prompt more imaginative thinking in policy circles.

There is one area in which further insights are needed. This concerns the role and influence of China beyond its immediate neighborhood in East and Southeast Asia. Up north, Russia watches uncomfortably, and misperceptions have pestered relations between the two countries even though forecasts in the West tend to cast Russia and China as loose allies to balance Western power. In the south, India's view of China is also problematic. Though friendly on the surface, New Delhi vacillates between assertion and accommodation.

India's golden age of accommodation toward China was the decade immediately after Indian independence. Conversely, India may have reached the peak of assertiveness when, in the wake of the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, India's defense minister identified China—not Pakistan—as the country's "threat number one."<sup>1</sup> India's image of China has evolved considerably—from solidarity in the 1950s, to enmity in the '60s, to rejection in the '70s, to envy in the '80s, and to emulation since the '90s. My own research in applied constructivism highlights this evolution and the policy consequences. Unlike East and Southeast Asia, India has always been uncomfortable with China's rise. British India in the early twentieth century envisioned potential conflict with China, and Nehru, India's first prime minister, noted both before and after the Indo-China War of 1962 that India's natural competitor for Asian leadership is China. In parallel with China, India began to emphasize its own historical and civilizational ties to Southeast Asia, whether in culture,

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<sup>1</sup> See "India's New Defense Chief Sees Chinese Military Threat," *New York Times*, May 5, 1998; and Richard Weixing Hu, "India's Nuclear Bomb and Future Sino-Indian Relations," *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (March 1999): 40–68.

religion, politics, or trade. As economic growth in China took off in the 1980s, so did economic analyses in India of China's policies and implications. By the 1990s New Delhi was interpreting China's economic growth as a distinct political advantage in international affairs at India's expense.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, Indian policy circles construct China as a rival, at times even of civilizational proportions—covering everything from language to export processing zones to space exploration. Thus even though China might intend its rise to remain peaceful, India, as the second largest country in Asia, may not be as accommodating as other countries in the neighborhood. For though Southeast Asia is marked, as Kang argues, by an absence of fear of China, many influential commentators and policymakers in India are still burdened by the opposite feeling—dread of a rising China.<sup>3</sup>

David Kang's applied constructivism makes a convincing case for East and Southeast Asia's acceptance of China's rise and their preference for a strong China in the region. The focus on East and Southeast Asia arguably has accorded a bit of sample bias. To be sure, Kang is careful to limit his generalizations to East Asian international relations, with respect to which he notes two determinants for the future of China's peaceful rise: U.S. response and the evolution of identity in the region. On both counts, however, what happens outside of China's "safe zone" will be important. A peaceful China rooted in historic connections and interpretations within its neighborhood may coexist with an aggressive China outside the region, where Beijing is more likely to face potential challengers—just as challenges to U.S. leadership did not come historically from North and South America. During the Cold War the Soviet Union was challenged more directly outside Europe, with tragic consequences for the third world. In recent years China has been venturing farther outside of East and Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> Hunger for energy, for instance, has pitted India and China in bitter competition from Myanmar to sub-Saharan Africa. After China hosted a summit for African leaders in November 2006, India followed suit in April 2008; one of the dominant themes at both summits was access to resources. Thus what China

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<sup>2</sup> For details, see Jalal Alamgir, "Nationalist Globalism: The Narrative of Strategic Politics and Economic Openness in India," in *Globalization and Politics in India*, ed. Baldev Raj Nayar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The references are too many to cite. See, among others, Mohammed Ayoob, "India and the Major Powers," *Hindu*, May 30, 2000. Ayoob describes China's objectives with respect to India as "clearly malevolent." See also Steven A. Hoffmann, "Perception and China Policy in India," *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, ed. Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> For a recent review of China's forays, see "A Ravenous Dragon," Special Report, *Economist*, March 15–21, 2008, along with the other essays in that section.

does outside its precinct—what ideas and norms China promotes in the world at large and how those ideas and norms are interpreted, constructed, and acted upon—will together become a wider test of the peaceful rise thesis.

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## China's Rise and the West's Bias

*Bin Yu*

Until the publication of David Kang's *China Rising*, China's rise was greeted with apprehension, alarm, and even outright antagonism by much of Western academia, including general international relations (IR) theorists and China studies scholars. Kang proffers a "puzzle": why has the rapid rise of China not led to a balancing backlash by other Asian nations? Kang's answer is to "de-Orientalize"<sup>1</sup> China as it was: a big power but also a nice one.

### *IR Theorists' Blind Spots*

For most Western theorists, China's behavior in history is either unheard of or unthinkable. As a result, realists are worried that China's rise inevitably will upset the Western-dominated international system,<sup>2</sup> and the liberalist "democracy-peace" treatise has no room for the rise of a non-Western, non-Christian, non-white, and undemocratic (not of Western-style) power like China.<sup>3</sup> Samuel Huntington's brilliant yet provocative "clash of civilizations" discourse provides a convenient package for a "grave" new world, in which China's Confucianist culture would conspire with Islam to undo the West.<sup>4</sup> These theorists derive their conclusions from the West's own history of social Darwinism and amplify this history as universal (p. 23). Seemingly unaware

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (December 1986): 1115–69.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 93 (Summer 1993): 45.

that interstate relations can be carried out differently, these theorists contend that the West's past of wars and conquest will be China's future as a great power.

According to Kang, a strong China has not historically been associated with aggression or expansionism. The number and boundaries of countries in East Asia have remained essentially the same since AD 1200 (pp. 3–7). In contrast, the independent European states, numbering some 500 in the year 1500, were reduced in number to 20 by 1900 (pp. 37–41). There were many losers in the course of Western history.

There is a key difference between the East Asian and Western systems: the East Asian system of yesteryear consisted of formal hierarchy and informal equality (with neighboring states enjoying *de facto* autonomy), whereas the Western system has established formal equality but informal hierarchy based on power, balance of power, or hegemony. With a strong China in East Asia, other nations in the region did not wish to challenge China, and China had no need to fight (pp. 25, 41). A system that for millennia had served the interests of all in East Asia was swiftly displaced in the nineteenth century by a Western system of equality (sovereignty) in name—a survival-of-the-fittest system in reality. For East Asia this meant opium trade, territorial loss, and colonial conquest. And the rest is history.

Only in the last 30 years, with China once again having become a strong and stable power in East Asia, have the region's states exhibited a semblance of the traditional mode of reciprocity. China's steady rise has so far engendered regional stability, mutual prosperity, and greater cooperation.

### *China Studies: "Trees" without "Forests"*

If on the one hand IR theorists' lack of awareness of China's history and culture may be understandable—though not excusable—on the other hand Kang's finding also challenges some China experts who immerse themselves deeply in China's culture and history.

One such group is the strategic-cultural school of thought pioneered by Harvard's Iain Johnston. Based on his review of Chinese military classics from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Johnston questioned the authenticity of notions of Confucian-Mencianism as moralistic, violence evasive, and antimilitaristic.<sup>5</sup> Separately, a recent study of the Qing Dynasty's military

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<sup>5</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

conquests argues that traditional China was as guilty of aggression toward other states as the West.<sup>6</sup>

The “strategic cultural” argument has been hailed by many in the China studies field. “If Johnston’s analysis of China’s strategic culture is correct—and I believe that it is—generational change will not guarantee a kinder, gentler China,” wrote historian Warren Cohen.<sup>7</sup>

Nowhere does the “grand strategy” argument, however, acknowledge that, as the last Chinese Han Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty was sandwiched between two “barbarian” controlled empires. Such a predicament suggests that in the Ming Dynasty, perhaps more than at any other time in the history of traditional China, rulers were aware of the danger of again being conquered—which eventually did come to pass with the Manchu conquest. One thus wonders why the Ming Dynasty, being supposedly so militaristic, was overwhelmed by the Manchus. Similarly with regard to the perceived militarism of the Qing Dynasty, if the Manchus were so aggressive then how and why did the Manchu Dynasty fail to maintain China’s vast frontier region in the face of the Western onslaught? Johnston and Waley-Cohen ignore a key historical fact: that at the peak of power under the Ming Dynasty, even with Admiral Zheng He in command of a powerful fleet of hundreds of ocean-going ships, China chose to stay home (p. 30).

### *Identity Making, Unmaking, and Remaking*

In contrast to cherry-picked historical evidence of China’s “aggressiveness,” Kang’s broader brush portrayal of China’s identity as an anchor of regional stability opens up considerable intellectual space. Further effort is needed, however, to delve into the deeper philosophical underpinnings of China’s behavior. One of these underpinnings was the Confucian notion of “unity/harmony with or without uniformity.” Western IR theories and policies, however, insist on unity *because of* (or *by, of, and for*) uniformity; hence, NATO members must be democracies and European Union members must be European, Christian—and perhaps even white. Shifting to the East Asian “zone of Confucianism, however, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations consists of ten states with various political systems, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization interfaces with nearly

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Warren I. Cohen, “China’s Strategic Culture,” *Atlantic Monthly* 279, no. 3 (March 1997): 1–3, 105. Others who agree include Roderick MacFarquhar, Arthur Waldron, and Joseph W. Esherick, to mention just a few.

all major civilizations: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism. This Confucian underpinning, therefore, is perhaps the key to explaining how China constructed its own identity and has conducted relations with others.

Another potential growth area for constructivist discourse is the notion of “socially constructed” identity (p. 20), which—although harmless sounding—requires more discriminative scrutiny in the case of China. If anything, China’s “socialization” path into the modern era was not chosen but imposed in the nineteenth century when the West brutally replaced the culturally centered “rules of the game” in East Asia with its own survival-of-the-fittest game. A close analogy to this is the forced migration of Africans to Colonial America: Europeans chose—but Africans were forced, in chains—to come to the New World. China suffered the “mother of all” identity distortions from the First Opium War (1839–42): unequal treaties, unbearable indemnities, extraterritoriality, territorial losses (Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Tibet, which “drifted” away thanks to years of British effort to “open” the region to “trade”), and the eventual collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Japan’s gradual intrusions into China—the “21 demands” (1915), Shandong (1919), Manchuria (1931), and the Rape of Nanjing (1937)—were compounded by Stalin’s engineering of Outer Mongolian independence from China in 1924.<sup>8</sup> Next came Nazi Germany’s expeditions to Tibet in 1938 and 1943,<sup>9</sup> followed by CIA covert operations throughout the 1950s and 60s that culminated in the 1959 Tibetan Rebellion.<sup>10</sup> The distortion of China’s identity, therefore, went hand in hand with the weakening of China in the age of imperialism. The eclipse of China’s identity continued—even after the two devastating world wars and into the Cold War, which was the last stage of the centuries-long “Western civil wars”<sup>11</sup>—when China had to choose between Western communism and Western liberalism.

Only after 30 years of stability and steady rise has China, Asia’s giant, been able to regain its historical identity as the anchor for regional stability. Meanwhile, Japan has yet to find its place in Asia. On the eve of the 21st century, Japanese political scientist Kitaoka Shin’ichi defined Japan as “a country that sits on the outskirts of Western civilization but continues to

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<sup>8</sup> Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Geopolitics* (unpublished manuscript, 2007), 34. This book has since been published in 2008 by Brookings and Chatham House.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Moon, *The Black Sun: Montauk’s Nazi-Tibetan Connection*, Montauk Series, Book 4 (New York: Skybooks, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *The CIA’s Secret War in Tibet* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> William Lind, cited in Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” 23.

thrive as an independent civilization not completely overwhelmed by Western culture.”<sup>12</sup> Nowhere does this description relate Japan to Asia, from which Japan historically borrowed heavily. Japan’s identity confusion began 140 years ago when the Empire of the Sun chose to depart from its Asian heritage for Westernization, only to return to Asia with brutal and unstoppable force—war with China (1894–95) and the annexation of Taiwan, the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), the annexation of Korea (1910), the occupation of Manchuria (1931), all-out war with China (1937), and Pearl Harbor (1941)—until defeat in 1945. In a period spanning 50 years Japan fought all of its neighbors until the combined forces of China, Russia, and the United States, aided by nuclear weapons, capped this relatively small island nation’s militarist ascendance.

In retrospect, militant Japan—the “honorary ‘white’ nation”<sup>13</sup>—caused untold misery to Asians in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the Rape of Nanjing, germ warfare by Unit 731, and “comfort women,” among the atrocities committed by the emperor’s soldiers during this period, have almost evaporated from the minds of the Japanese today. Such national amnesia is perhaps almost inevitable after Japan’s efforts to whitewash its militarist past in order to shed its pacifist probation in favor of being “normal” again. Japan’s failure to translate economic clout into regional political leadership (p. 7) perhaps has little to do with the U.S.-Japan alliance and more to do with the country’s confused identity.

The tale of these two identities (China’s and Japan’s) lies at the very heart of the “puzzle” of why Asia is still wary of a Westernized and democratic Japan—be it “pacifist” or “normal”—while willing to accommodate a rising and Confucianist China.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Green, *Japan’s Reluctant Realism* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 24.

## Anticipating the Unexpected

*Peter Van Ness*

An academic colleague once recommended that every International Relations 101 course, no matter where in the world it was taught, should begin with the forceful injunction to “expect the unexpected.” The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic tsunami of the East Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, and even the unexpected response of President George W. Bush to September 11—each of these instances is evidence of the wisdom of this injunction. Realists have demonstrated the importance of developing worst-case scenarios for strategic analysis, but the unexpected can challenge whatever paradigm we employ in our attempt to understand the world in which we live.

Reading David Kang’s *China Rising* prompted me to think again about this injunction. Kang has produced the most comprehensive assessment to date of China’s relations with its East Asian neighbors over the past fifteen years, analyzed in thoughtfully researched empirical detail. His book gives a clear depiction of the success to date of PRC foreign policy and a wake-up call for the United States about how the region has changed while President Bush has been preoccupied with his various interventions in the Middle East. The principal shortcoming of this impressive study, however, is the book’s strong implication that the future is likely to be a linear projection of the period he has examined. The depth and quality of Kang’s investigation lulls the reader to infer that the situation that he describes is the way things are and are likely to continue to be as far as anyone can tell. The book gives no warning about the unexpected.

*China Rising* challenges the more typical structural analyses of the rise of China, especially realist arguments regarding the dangers of conflict between emerging powers and the established dominant power within a particular geopolitical region. Kang’s critique is built upon a constructivist interpretation of compatible national identities among the countries in the region. One way to look at the book is as a story of how successful the PRC has been in refuting charges that there is a “China threat.” Kang finds that China’s neighbors are accommodating to China’s rise in power and responding to Beijing’s

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innovations by participating in a range of mutually beneficial economic and political arrangements.

What is wrong with this picture? Nothing—at least with regard to the fifteen years that Kang has studied. Although Kang has done an excellent and important job, one weakness of relying too much on a constructivist approach is that norms and identities are often more vulnerable to sudden change than analysts might assume. This propensity is especially true with respect to crisis situations such as the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union or the fall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia prompted by the 1997 financial crisis. The combination of a crisis and a change in national leadership increases the likelihood of fundamental change. Who would have expected, for example, that the newly elected President Bush would react to the terrorist attacks of September 11 by invading a sovereign state unconnected with the attacks, kidnapping suspects off the streets of other countries, holding prisoners without due process, and torturing inmates as matters of official policy: all of which are violations of core American values that are consecrated in the U.S. Constitution and fundamental to American national identity.

The Chinese Communist Party leadership has done an amazing job of guiding China through thirty years of unprecedented growth and economic modernization. These leaders realize that their success relies on a stable international environment conducive to increasing foreign trade, investment, and technology transfer. The Chinese leadership has studied meticulously the past history of the rise of emerging powers, particularly the history of Germany and Japan, and worked constantly to avoid falling into the trap of repeating the twentieth-century history of wars. As Kang documents, China's diplomacy has been exemplary.

Yet a number of immense problems—most importantly, environmental deterioration, corruption, and increasing income inequalities—confront China's leaders. Moreover the party's claim to exercise a monopoly of political power in China is based on a shaky set of three promises: continued high rates of economic growth, political and social stability throughout the country, and an active defense of China's nationalist credentials. For example, despite their success to date, China's leaders have put forward no serious answer to the combined problems of environmental destruction and water scarcity in North China, a deteriorating situation in one of the most polluted countries in the world. Furthermore, a communist government attempting to guide a capitalist revolution in a formerly socialist state of 1.3 billion people should always expect to be confronted by the unexpected. No country has ever done what Beijing is doing—the Chinese leaders have to invent it as they go

along. Successful innovation almost always involves learning from one's own mistakes—sometimes big mistakes.

The sudden protests in Lhasa in March 2008, followed by Tibetan protests in different parts of China and sympathy protests abroad, have created a serious dilemma for the Chinese leaders as they plan for a “best ever” Olympics in August 2008. The Chinese leadership apparently had no expectation that such events might occur when organizing a torch relay to Qomolangma (Mount Everest) on the way to Beijing, where they have invested so much capital and prestige in holding an exemplary Olympic Games competition. Chinese officials have responded to the protests with an insistent repression, sometimes fueled with Cultural Revolution rhetoric, and a rejection of advice from foreign leaders to seek to dialogue with the Dalai Lama. At this writing (mid-April, just prior to the running of the Olympic torch through Canberra), it is unclear whether events will snowball into an even more serious crisis before the Games begin in August. But consider what might happen during the Games if, for example, a young woman wins the 100-meter butterfly in record time and then pulls a Tibetan flag out of her top and starts waving it in the face of swimming officials. What will the Chinese authorities do? Send in the People's Armed Police, in front of an elite international audience during peak global media coverage of the event?

Like my friend said, expect the unexpected.

**Author's Response:  
Ideas and Power in East Asian International Relations**

*David C. Kang*

I am deeply grateful that such excellent scholars have taken my book seriously and have made such interesting and insightful points. I agree with many of their observations, and in this response I will clarify and comment on four themes that run through many of the responses: regions, identity and hierarchy, realist explanations, and the future.

*Regions*

Writing a book on a single region's response to a central regional actor constitutes a difficult exercise, especially when the main focus of the book is a country already moving beyond the region and becoming a global actor. Yet while China's global impact is beginning to be felt broadly, the country still remains first and foremost an East Asian actor, and states there must deal with China every day on all fronts: political, economic, and cultural. For that reason, *China Rising* is restricted in focus to only East Asia—in this region we can see the most direct impact of China's rise and these states have already been forced to deal with China.

Thus I agree with Jalal Alamgir and Ellen Frost that how India and China interact may have key repercussions for stability in the future. Yet rather than a comprehensive overview of China's relations with every global actor, this book was written instead as a regional-level view on how states most directly interact with China. When focusing only on the East Asian region, it is harder to make the case that India is currently a major factor. For the time being, New Delhi is more focused on relations within South Asia, and particularly with Islamabad, and India's economic growth is probably a decade behind China's. Thus most scholarship exploring "Chindia" is prospective, being based on expectations regarding what might happen in the future. Although India and China do interact over border issues and Tibet, India is not yet a major economic or diplomatic presence in East Asia: India is not central to the North Korean problem, the Taiwan issue, or even to questions regarding Southeast Asian economic integration with China. For that reason *China Rising* did not include a focus on India.

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I also wanted to emphasize in the book that taking East Asian history seriously is important for understanding the region. I did not claim, however, that the China-centered system of the fourteenth century will replicate itself today. What is important is to understand the history of these states, to realize how different their history is from that of Europe, and to ask how and in what way this might matter, as Bin Yu has pointed out. We should avoid making sweeping claims that present either an unbroken chronological continuity or an encompassing geographic component. When studying East Asia, it is sometimes seductive to claim that behavior is immutable, permanent, and unchanging from the ancient mists of time up to the present era. Yet East Asia has changed as much as any other part of the world: some cultural traits have historical roots, others do not, and all are constantly evolving depending on the circumstance, situation, institutional constraints, political and economic exigencies, and a host of other factors. There is no “eternal China,” which exists unchanging outside of time, space, and dimension; nor is there a one-size-fits-all model of diplomacy (such as the tribute system) that has been applied identically in every situation since time immemorial. Although historical China was a font of civilizational ideas throughout the region, modern East Asian states no more turn to China for practical ideas on how to order their polity and society any more than Western states look to modern Greece.

### *Identity and Hierarchy*

The main theoretical point of *China Rising* was that we need to take seriously state intentions, goals, and identities. The two dominant strands of thinking in international relations—realism and liberalism—are both largely mechanistic and material. Realism, with a focus on material power, expects that larger states will be threatening to smaller states. Liberalism, with a focus on interdependence, expects that the more two countries trade, the fewer incentives they will have to fight. One reason that these two seemingly plausible arguments have generated so much controversy, however, is that both operate without relying on intentions of the actors. What states want is more important than how powerful they are: sometimes states balance larger powers; other times they accept a hegemon. Sometimes more trade reduces conflict; other times trade increases it.

Shifting our focus away from material and structural factors and toward state goals and perceptions gives us a very different set of questions, and a very different set of answers, than the standard realist and liberal approaches. The reason that China’s rise has not prompted balancing among East Asian states,

while at the same time the reason that increasing regional interdependence has not also solved all political problems, is because the goals and motivations of the actors are more important than material and structural factors. Thus, instead of asking how big is China, we should ask what are China's goals. Similarly, we should focus on how the other East Asian states interpret China's goals and what these states' own motivations and concerns are. Viewed from this angle, it is increasingly clear that East Asian states see little Chinese appetite for imperialism or conquest but instead see great opportunities for mutual economic growth.

Regarding interdependence, without change in the intentions and attitudes of the actors, increasing levels of trade is merely market exchange. Indeed, countries can do business with each other for years without changing mutual perceptions. This is one reason many Japanese are frustrated today: though Japan has been both a responsible member of the international community and a key economic actor in the region for sixty years, this fact in and of itself has done little to change perceptions or identities in East Asia. The weight of history and the role of apologies appears more important in East Asia for the resolution of political conflicts than does either the balance of power or the terms of trade—these latter issues are mainly a function of how national identities have developed at cross-purposes with each other. Alexis Dudden has recently published an excellent book on memory and apologies in East Asia that makes this case quite compellingly.<sup>1</sup>

As for hierarchy, I continue to work on that concept, most notably with respect to further research on the historical East Asian system as well as on the contemporary era. Additionally I'm pleased that other scholars are working on subjects similar to this: Evelyn Goh's own work has incorporated elements of this perspective, and Richard Ned Lebow and William Wohlforth also have work in this same vein.<sup>2</sup>

### *Realist Responses*

Despite how reasonable I (naturally) find my own argument to be, realists remain unconvinced and proffer a number of rejoinders. Significantly,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 113–57; Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and William Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great-Power War" (unpublished manuscript, 2008).

however, realist responses do tend to accept my central empirical claim: that East Asian states are not balancing China. Christopher Twomey's insightful contribution also grants this basic point, which presents a major retreat for realists. As Richard Betts has pointed out, the key fundamental question is whether other states want China to become rich or not.<sup>3</sup> At heart realists would generally conclude that allowing or helping a potential superpower grow richer is a risky strategy and that states thus would not engage in such behavior. Yet to that end East Asian states—and much of the world—do not appear to be attempting to contain China. Indeed they are doing the opposite: helping China integrate into the world and develop its economy.

Realists are thus left with an ad hoc set of hypotheses to explain why balancing is not occurring. The two most common hypotheses, as Christopher Twomey notes, are “the stopping power of water” and “some states are too small to balance.” Both expositions, I find, have inherent problems in logic.

First, as Christopher Twomey describes, realists generally see water as reducing threats because water “greatly impedes the projection of power across seas and oceans.” Thus it seems fairly straightforward that Japan should feel less threatened by China than Korea or Vietnam, not more; and should therefore balance less than mainland states bordering China. Yet oddly enough, it is Japan, rather than Korea or Vietnam, that evinces skepticism regarding China, and Christopher Twomey argues that water allows Japan to “engage in the most robust competition with China.” This is unfalsifiable: Japan is less threatened because of water hence balances most; yet if Japan were not skeptical, the claim could just as easily be reversed: Japan is less threatened because of water and therefore does not balance. To have it both ways—Japan is more protected because 50 miles separate the country from the mainland, yet Japan is also more likely to balance—strikes me as forced.

I also find problematic the “too small to balance” (or “capitulation”) argument, which is a post-hoc argument that requires much better empirical proof. Capitulation to a larger power is observationally equivalent to accommodation. The critical difference between the two, however, is whether there is an external threat. Simply working backward from the observation of “not balancing” does not imply a threat because a lack of balancing could result from either accommodation or capitulation. To make the case compellingly, independent evidence is needed that a state fears

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<sup>3</sup> Richard K. Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1993/94): 55.

another state, has searched for balancing options such as allies or internal militarization, has realized that no options exist, and therefore decides to surrender. Thus the hypothesis that small states wish to balance but lack the capabilities to do so is a virtually unfalsifiable concept. I also wonder how prevalent capitulation actually is—there is a fair amount of empirical evidence that small states fight more powerful states all the time if their direct interests are challenged. Even in East Asia, Vietnam fought China 30 years ago when these two countries' interests were not aligned, and today North Korea continues to defy the United States.

### *The Future*

Ultimately we are as concerned with predicting how the region will develop as with explaining the past three decades. Peter Van Ness makes this point clearly, and I agree with him entirely. My only disagreement with his critique is that *China Rising* never implied that the future would be like the past. The book stated explicitly that its intent is to explain the past three decades of China's emergence, and that, "any prediction a generation into the future is mere speculation. How Chinese identity and power will develop is unknowable, and speculation is not a very satisfying scholarly exercise" (p. 202).

To that end, the book attempted to isolate those important causal factors that will shape the future of Chinese intentions and beliefs. I remain completely convinced that how China develops its own beliefs about itself and its position in the world, and how other states in East Asia also develop, will have a greater impact on how China rises than the mere balance of power that obtains a generation from now. Generally speaking the goals and identities of the states in the region, and how they evolve, will be central to determining whether states adjust to and accept China or whether they increasingly compete with and fear China. Will Chinese nationalism remain brittle, chauvinist, and insecure? Or will nationalism become more moderate, globalized, and responsible? We have no idea. How will the Chinese Communist Party evolve? Will the party still exist thirty years from now? We also have no idea. Can Japan overcome its identity problem and find a way to coexist with its neighbors? How will a unified Korea view itself? Would such a country exhibit stridently proud nationalism at finally having reunified, or would the country develop into a mature ally of the United States? These are the key questions to ask, for the answers will determine

much of whether the future of East Asia is increasingly stable or unstable. As Richard Samuels has written on this point:

the challenge for China is how to become socialized into a world order with rules and norms valuing democracy and human rights...For the rest of us...the challenge is to socialize ourselves to an emerging new order that makes room not only for Japanese sovereignty, but also for Chinese power—even in terms of moral authority.<sup>4</sup>

What China, East Asia, and the world will be like a generation from now is at best an educated guess. It is likely, however, that Chinese and East Asian ideas regarding themselves and their place in the world will be more important for regional stability than simply how big or rich China becomes. ◆

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Samuels, "How Japan Balances Strategy and Constraint," *Asia Policy*, no. 4 (July 2007): 208.