

Why China's Rise May Not Cause Major Power-Transition War: A Review Essay

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This article seeks to review these theoretical debates in light of recent empirical evidence. The two publications are selected for two reasons. First, *China's Ascent* is a collection of contributions made by leading scholars in the field of international security and is based on different optimistic perspectives on the question of China's rise. The second publication, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China*, was more recently published. Based on some of the theoretical insights and empirical evidence presented by the authors in the two volumes, I argue that the Asia-Pacific region is bound to remain stable and potentially more peaceful if and when China becomes a liberal democracy.

Key words: China, China's foreign policy, China's rise, power transition, major war

China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 323 pages, Index. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Eds.). 2008.

Southeast Asia and the Rise of China. London and New York: Routledge. 362 pages, Index. Ian Storey. 2011.

Over the last few decades, the rise of China has generated intense academic and policy debate about the future of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. Scholars and policymakers still disagree not only on how to measure the growth of Chinese power but also on whether its growth will be peaceful or unpeaceful and what factors contribute to the peaceful or unpeaceful nature of China's rise. For realist pessimists, the rise of China is likely to be unpeaceful because the Asian power operates within the anarchical international system and is thus expected to keep maximizing relative power in search of hegemonic status that guarantees its survival and security (Mearsheimer, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). For optimists—who range from those who subscribe to defensive realism to those

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who embrace commercial pacifism, neoliberal institutionalism, Kantian internationalism, and social constructivism—the peaceful rise of China can be explained through one or more of these theoretical lenses.

This article seeks to examine these theoretical debates in light of recent empirical evidence. The two publications are reviewed for two reasons. First, *China's Ascent* (Ross & Zhu, 2008) is a collection of contributions made by leading scholars in the field of international security and is based on different optimistic perspectives on the question of China's rise. Meanwhile the second publication, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China* (Storey, 2011), is less of a theoretical treatment of China's rise and foreign-policy responses from states in Southeast Asia; it is a more recent publication and provides empirical details that help shed light on the question raised in this article: will the rise of China be peaceful or unpeaceful?

A close examination of China's role in Southeast Asia helps us understand the nature of China's rise because this is the region in which China has the most immediate interest and where Chinese leaders have concentrated much of their attention because of geographical proximity. Based on some of the theoretical insights and empirical evidence presented by the authors in the two volumes, I argue that the Asia-Pacific region is bound to remain stable and potentially more peaceful if and when China becomes a liberal democracy.

What is interesting about *China's Ascent* is the fact that the volume contains the contributions of scholars who belong to different theoretical traditions but share a sense of optimism about the future prospects of China's rise. There are various reasons why the growth of Chinese power will not destabilize the region. In Chapter 1 on "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," Jack Levy provides a powerful critique of Power Transition theory, arguing that its proponents overlook the fact that major wars—such as World Wars I and II—break out at the regional, rather than at the global, level and have regional causes. The dominant power within the regional system is more likely to engage in preventive war for the defense of the status quo: the aim is to prevent a rising power from overtaking the dominant power. Regional great-power wars in the nuclear age are unlikely when states engaged in the struggle for dominance possess nuclear weapons with deterrent effects. As nuclear powers, China and the United States are not expected to wage war against each other.

Another optimistic perspective, which is somewhat close to neoclassical realism, is that China has been and will be constrained by the current international system characterized as unipolar—that is, dominated by the United States. Operating within this hierarchical system, China is reluctant to challenge the United States because of both systemic and domestic constraints that are interpreted to reinforce Chinese strategic restraint. This is the thesis advanced by Zhu Feng in Chapter 2.

The Asia-Pacific has become stable because of regional bipolarity. Robert Ross and Zhu Feng see stability in the Asia-Pacific in terms of regional bipolarity. Initially advanced by Ross (1999), the thesis is that the region has become stable because neither the United States nor China is in a position to dominate the other. China has emerged as the dominant player in the landmass of Southeast Asia, North Korea, and Asia's interior regions. With its blue-water naval superiority, the United States maintains its dominance over the maritime states of Southeast Asia and Japan. Global unipolarity and regional bipolarity help "ease

the likelihood of power transition war" (p. 298). This reaffirms the thesis that China is reluctant to challenge the United States with the aim of achieving world hegemonic status.

Other optimists, however, count on other constraints on China's ascent. While anarchy, polarity, relative power, geography, and weapons technology matter, other variables such as domestic politics and economic conditions also matter. According to Avery Goldstein (Chapter 3), Chinese foreign policy is more prone to aggression if the Chinese economy becomes unstable. When faced with domestic economic problems and thus driven by the need to maintain its political legitimacy, the Chinese leadership is likely to turn belligerent toward other states. In Chapter 10, Jonathan Kirshner further reinforces Goldstein's thesis by adding that international economic instability or a sudden interruption of China's growth trajectory can also put pressure on Beijing to adopt a belligerent foreign policy. But if the United States is in recession and reduces imports from China or if the U.S. currency collapses, the U.S. military ability to confront China will be undermined. China's economic growth prospects will also be undermined and its foreign policy will be destabilizing. Helping China to continue growing economically and engaging it in the global economy will help China pursue a moderate foreign policy. All this implies that a stable global economy to which China stays integrated is likely to keep the rising state at peace with others, especially the United States.

Other constraints on China's rising power also exist: they include international institutions, rules, norms, and a regional community identity advanced by liberal institutionalists and constructivists. G. John Ikenberry (Chapter 4) advances the argument that international institutions matter significantly. The United States took the lead in building international institutions after World War II, but it has also been constrained by what it helped to create. As a result, China has not perceived the United States as a mortal threat to its national security, and this will help reduce any likelihood for power-transition war. In Chapter 5, Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling further advance a process-focused constructivist argument that China's participation in global and regional institutions has allowed it to benefit from the institutionalized order, become cooperative through the process of socialization initiated by mutual need, common interests, and expectations for peaceful change, and is thus less inclined to engage in power-transition warfare.

In addition to structural and institutional constraints, political leaders can also learn to make policy choices that contribute to peace and stability. Chinese leaders are no exception: Mao Zedong's foreign policy was in line with offensive realism, but Deng Xiaoping and his successors have conformed to the logic of defensive realism because their understanding of the security dilemma requires cooperation and self-restraint. Tang Shiping advances this argument in Chapter 6. However, this learning process also depends on how other states respond to China's ascent. In Chapter 7, Jeffrey W. Legro argues that we need to understand how Chinese leaders think about the world because they tend to respond to what other states, especially major powers, do or how they treat China. Beijing is less likely to be a troublemaker if other powers can accommodate China's interests and engage it in multilateral frameworks that address Beijing's policy priorities such as economic development, defense of sovereignty, and unification with Taiwan.

An additional source of concern about China's ascent has something to do with how states respond to the rise of China. In Chapter 8, Byung-Kook Kim contends that South Korea has posed less of a threat to China partly because its alliance with the United States has been eroding and its foreign policy toward North Korea has become moderate. Domestic foreign policy consensus has been eroding. In other words, domestic politics helps determine how states like South Korea respond to China's ascent by accommodating it. Unlike South Korea, however, Japan has responded to China's ascent in a more negative or realist way. Akio Takahara's Chapter 9 advances this argument. Instead of accommodating China's growing power, Tokyo is seen as having adopted a more proactive foreign policy that loosens up restrictions on Japan's global political, diplomatic, and military roles. Instead of letting its security alliance with the United States erode as South Korea did, Japan chose to strengthen it. Japanese nationalism is also on the rise.

But Robert Art's Chapter 11 strikes another note of optimism by making the case that the United States can play a constructive role in managing China's ascent: Washington should adopt a combined strategy of strength and accommodation. War between the two powers is unlikely, partly because of Sino-American mutually assured destruction and common interests that they share. The United States must preserve its maritime supremacy in East Asia, maintain its East-Asian alliances and security arrangements, and help institutionalize security multilateralism in the region. The United States must not, however, take any punitive action against China, especially if unprovoked, and should accommodate the latter's national interests, such as providing no support for Taiwan's push for political independence.

In short, the contributors in *China's Ascent* are a group of optimists who subscribe to different theoretical traditions, and this diversity of perspectives makes the volume unique and most interesting. Together they paint a positive picture of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific amid the worrisome rise of China. It is a wonderful textbook on the topic. The question is whether their optimistic perspectives hold water: whether China has become the continental power that dominates the mainland part of Asia and whether regional institutions, rules, norms, and dialogues have effectively restrained China's foreign policy behavior.

China definitely keeps rising, especially when measured in terms of its economic growth and military might. It has become much wealthier and militarily more powerful than ever before. The economy has expanded so rapidly that by 2010 it overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world. As a military power, China has also shown an impressive record of development. Its military buildup continues unabated and at an alarming rate. Between 1996 and 2006, China's military spending had an annual average increase of 11.8%, while the economic growth rate was only 9.6%. Between 2007 and 2012, the annual average rate of increase was even higher, with totals jumping from \$45 billion to \$106.4 billion. China's official defense budget figures over the last 12 years show that they have jumped from only \$14.6 billion in 2000, to \$17 billion in 2001, \$20 billion in 2002, \$22 billion in 2003, \$29.9 billion in 2005, \$35 billion in 2006, \$45 billion in 2007, \$57.22 billion in 2008, \$77.9 billion in 2010, \$91.5 billion in 2011, and \$106.4 billion in 2012. According to some estimates, China's military budget in 2015 will surpass that of all 12 Asian-Pacific neighbors (Richburg, 2012). China is no match

for the United States, which planned to spend \$613.9 billion for fiscal year 2013. On the other hand, the Chinese military expenditure is closing the gap: about \$450 billion or three-quarters that of the United States, when measured on a purchasing power parity basis.¹

All this evidence further raises the question of how significantly regional structures, institutions, rules, norms, and dialogues matter in terms of explaining China's restrained behavior. It seems that structural constraints, as discussed earlier, are more powerful than institutional, social, and normative constraints, but are far from being determinants of China's policy or behavior. The United States may still be the world's hegemonic power when measured in terms of its economic and military capabilities with deterrent and restraining effects on what the Chinese leadership aspires to achieve. However, the manner by which other states in the Asia-Pacific have responded to the rise of China—based on their perceptions shaped by history, geographical proximity, territorial disputes, and ideological positions—helps to explain why China's influence has not ascended as rapidly as the growth of its economic and military power, and why it is unlikely to wage war for hegemonic-power status.

The second book, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China*, is a publication worth reading for several good reasons, including evidence showing how responses from states in the region have restrained China's foreign policy behavior. The book was published in 2011 and can thus be used to help us reflect on the theoretical arguments made in *China's Ascent*, which was published in 2008. The volume edited by Robert Ross and Zhu Feng focuses only on the responses to the rise of China from two states in Northeast Asia (South Korea and Japan) and the United States. Ian Storey's book focuses on the Southeast Asian states' responses to the growth of Chinese power.

In general, states in Southeast Asia tend to bandwagon with China's economic power, and Beijing has made substantial inroads into the region on the economic front since the early 1990s. Chapter 1 focuses on Sino-Southeast Asian relations during the Cold War. China's influence over this region from 1949 to 1975 was extremely limited because of the hostility that Southeast Asian states, except North Vietnam, showed due to Beijing's support for communist insurgencies in this region. But things began to turn around when Vietnam invaded Cambodia late in 1978, after which members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) began to turn to China as an ally in their shared interest of confronting Vietnam.

Chapter 2 pays attention to Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the 1990s. This chapter confirms the positive view of China's role in regional affairs. Once the threat of Vietnam associated with its occupation of Cambodia was gone, the ASEAN states did not turn against communist China as some realists would expect. Instead of actively balancing China and in spite of the United States' reduced military presence in the region, the ASEAN states sought to engage China in multilateral forums. Positive relations between the two sides grew as China embraced multilateralism in the mid-1990s. According to Storey, Beijing responded positively to the Asian financial crisis that erupted in 1997 and economic relations with Southeast Asia flourished.

In Chapter 3, Storey further shows that the period 2000–2010 saw some positive gains for both China and states in Southeast Asia, as well as some setbacks.

The two sides were satisfied with their economic cooperation, but tensions over the rival territorial claims in the South China Sea arose as the decade was drawing to a close. As China's naval power expanded, Beijing became more assertive and states in maritime Southeast Asia—such as Vietnam and the Philippines—began to take China's territorial threat more seriously. Overall, however, Sino-Southeast Asian relations remained positive, especially when compared with the post-1949 period.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on the extent to which states in mainland Southeast Asia—Vietnam, Thailand, Burma/Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia—have responded to the rise of China. Hanoi has sought to steer a path between hostility toward China and dependence on the latter. What is interesting about this chapter is that Vietnam has sought to hedge against China by improving economic relations with the latter without strengthening its military ties with the Chinese armed forces. Instead, Hanoi has moved more closely toward its Cold War enemy—the United States. From this perspective, it would be incorrect to suggest that China has dominated Vietnam.

China has not dominated Thailand either. Beijing and Bangkok have developed what Storey calls “a special relationship,” which grew out of the former's decision to stop supporting the Thai communist insurgents and to align with Thailand for strategic purposes after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. But then again, it would be incorrect to suggest that China has now dominated Thailand, which continues to maintain its security alliance with the United States.

The case of Myanmar is also interesting to the extent that China has made some deeper inroads into the Southeast Asian country in terms of economic penetration as well as political and military influence. Although the Burmese military leadership grew dependent on China's support, evidence suggests that the former has also resented the latter's interference in the domestic affairs of Myanmar. At the same time, Beijing was not pleased with the lack of reform in the Southeast Asian state. As the result of the domestic status quo in Myanmar, Chinese investments in the country have been put at risk. The chapter also tells us that Sino-Burmese relations may have developed from deference to dependence, but it is far from clear that China has maintained domination over the mainland Southeast Asian state. Now that Myanmar has opened itself for business, any argument that the country is subject to Chinese domination becomes even more problematic.

The same can be said about Chinese influence over Laos and Cambodia. As Chapter 7 shows, there is no doubt that relations between China and Laos are far from ideal. While the two countries have expanded their economic cooperation, Chinese political influence over Vientiane remains limited. The Laotian government continues to strike a balance of interest between Beijing and China's former enemy in Hanoi. While the gravity of the Chinese economy may make it difficult for Laos to maintain a stable equilibrium between China and Vietnam, there is no reason to expect Laos to be absorbed into the Chinese orbit in the near future.

Cambodia is probably the only mainland Southeast Asian country that has become increasingly dependent on China (while Myanmar seems to be on its path to becoming less so). China has provided Cambodia with economic, political, and military support, and can count on Hun Sen who has been the longest-serving prime minister in the world and remains politically unassailable. Recent

evidence further demonstrates that Cambodia tends to comply with Beijing's political wishes rather than to conform to the wishes of other ASEAN fellow members, especially when it comes to the unresolved disputes in the South China Sea.

Still, it would be incorrect to assert that China has now dominated Cambodia. Although China has become Cambodia's largest foreign investor and one of the latter's major donors in recent years, Cambodia still depends on the support of other donors. The United States remains Cambodia's largest trading partner and market. The main U.S. ally in Asia, Japan, has also been a major bilateral donor in Cambodia. Chinese military assistance to the Hun Sen government has not been substantial and there is no formal politico-military alliance between the two states.

The author of *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China* further tells us about the expansive role that Beijing has enjoyed over states in the maritime part of the region and the limits of Chinese influence. From the Philippines to East Timor, from Indonesia to Brunei and from Malaysia to Singapore, China has made impressive economic inroads since the end of the Cold War. In Chapter 9, China has accomplished things unimaginable during the Cold War when Indonesia's anticommunist President Suharto was still in power. According to Storey, the Indonesian elite and public perceptions of China as a threat have diminished and the relationship between the two countries has matured but is far from ideal. As the largest state in Southeast Asia, measured especially in terms of population and land size, Indonesia regards itself as the regional leader and is likely to clash with the regional ambition of China. In Storey's words, "Indonesia remained cautious on China, uneasy at its growing economic and military power, assertiveness in the South China Sea and at Beijing's leadership aspirations in Asia" (p. 192).

On Malaysia and China discussed in Chapter 10, Storey distinguishes the upbeat rhetoric and policy reality of their bilateral relations. The end of the Cold War resulted in a positive development of relations between the two countries, especially after the collapse of the Communist Party of Malaya formerly supported by Beijing, but the perception of "China threat" has not disappeared. Both states have engaged in territorial disputes over rival claims in the South China Sea, and Kuala Lumpur has helped facilitate U.S. military presence in Asia. While working to enmesh China in the regional security architecture, Malaysia continues to strike a balance between engagement and military balancing. According to Storey, "Malaysian governments continued to hedge against a rising China" (p. 227) and did so by continuing to host "visits by US armed forces" (p. 227). During the 2000s, "Malaysian and US forces trained and exercised on a regular basis, and the number of US naval vessels visiting Malaysian ports increased." (p. 227). While Malaysia was willing to accept U.S. assistance to improve the security of its maritime domain, it did not accept China's offer of "capacity building support to improve the security of the Straits of Malacca" (p. 227). All these go to show the limits of Chinese influence over Malaysia.

In Chapter 11 on Singapore and China, a similar but more forceful argument is made: Chinese influence over the city-state remains limited, despite the latter's rhetoric about the positive role China has played in the region, especially when Beijing supported the ASEAN position on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

Singapore's "realist pragmatism" has allowed it to move closer to China on the economic front, especially after the latter adopted capitalism in the late 1970s; however, China is not one of Singapore's security allies. The city-state has been consistent in terms of supporting U.S. policies during and after the Cold War, from anticommunist containment to power-balancing security politics. For Singapore, the United States remains the overarching force of regional stability: the only state capable of keeping in check the ambitions of rising powers like China.

Relations between the Philippines and China, discussed in Chapter 12, are even more problematical. By the mid-2000s, it looked as though the two states had finally reached a new positive level after their relations deteriorated throughout the 1990s: commercial ties grew, Beijing provided Manila with generous aid used to upgrade the latter's crumbling infrastructure, and tensions in the South China Sea were reduced. But the so-called "golden age" between the two states did not last, as their territorial disputes took center stage once again. China asserted its sovereignty over the disputed areas, especially Mischief Reef over which China consolidated its hold. Because of its feeble military capabilities, the Philippines turned to the United States for help. Although the U.S.-Philippine alliance received a boost after the United States engaged in a global war on terrorism after 2001, the latter has proved to be disappointing to Manila. Overall, Chinese influence over the Philippines has grown weaker, not stronger, in recent years.

The two smallest states in Southeast Asia, Brunei and East Timor, have improved their relations with China; however, Chinese influence over the two countries remains limited. In Chapter 13, Storey describes how bilateral relations between Brunei and China have been built on the former's ability to provide the latter with energy resources. But Brunei still regards its membership with ASEAN as the cornerstone of its foreign policy and still maintains strong defense links with Singapore and Western powers, most notably Australia, the UK, and the United States. Sino-Brunei relations are also unlikely to grow strong as long as the two states continue to have overlapping boundary claims in the South China Sea. In short, as Storey puts it, "Sino-Brunei military-security links seem unlikely to advance much beyond discussions and educational exchanges" (p. 273).

The last chapter on East Timor and China further reveals the limits of Chinese influence over the smallest and newest independent state in Southeast Asia. Historically, China was a key supporter of the left-leaning Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, but the Chinese war with Vietnam in 1979 turned Beijing's attention away from East Timor and toward Indonesia in search of Jakarta's support on the anti-Vietnam front. After it became an independent state in 2002, East Timor (now Timor-Leste) turned to China as an important source of foreign aid, and Beijing has seen some positive results from aiding Timor-Leste. However, the government in Dili has not looked up to Beijing as a key politico-military ally. According to Storey, "China's military aid and capacity-building support paled in comparison to that provided to F-FDTL [East Timor's armed forces] by Australia, Portugal, Brazil and the United Kingdom . . ." (p. 282).

Evidence thus shows that China has been rising, especially from an economic and military perspective. From a politico-geostrategic point of view, however, it has hardly made any deep inroads into the subregion. Cambodia and Myanmar

may have become the best allies of China, but neither has established a formal military alliance with Beijing, and the two Southeast Asian states are members of ASEAN, which also constrains what they can do to help advance Chinese interests.

What all this means is that the rise of Chinese influence over Southeast Asia has been exaggerated. China is in no position to challenge the United States on the military and political front. Washington has been rather effective in limiting Chinese influence by rallying states in the Asia-Pacific to see the need for its military presence in the region. The fact that the United States has been able to maintain its security alliances with South Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia, to keep its military ties with mainland and maritime Southeast Asian states like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, as well as to restore and strengthen military ties with Vietnam shows that China is not as politically influential as most commentators see it.

What then explains the limits of China's political influence and military expansion into its own region, despite the rapid rise of China's economic and military power? One answer to this question may have to do with the perceptions of China as a threat to other states' national security. To some extent, history matters. We cannot understand why Vietnam and China were ideological allies in the 1950s and 1960s but failed to maintain their alliance without "reaching back over 2000 years to the time when Vietnam was subject to Chinese suzerainty, first as a colony and then as a tributary state" (p. 101). But history alone does not explain the enduring legacy of Vietnamese distrust and suspicion of Chinese intentions and ambitions. Geography is another key variable that seems to be more powerful than ideological solidarity. Geography helps explain why Vietnam turned to the Soviet Union during the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s and to the United States in more recent years.

While history and geographical proximity appear to be key variables explaining the limits of Chinese influence despite its rapid economic and military growth, China's communist authoritarianism seems to be another cause of distrust and suspicion. It does not make sense to argue that states in Southeast Asia, especially those in the maritime subregion, have not sought to build politico-military alliances with China because of the latter's superior material power. The fact that most states in Northeast and Southeast Asia prefer to keep the United States—still the most powerful state on the planet—militarily engaged in the region goes to show that they do not balance against power. If China poses a threat to other states, it is not simply because of its demographic, economic, and military power alone but because of other nonmaterial factors—such as its history of territorial expansion, geographical proximity, and its socialist authoritarianism.

The perceived threat of socialist authoritarianism should not be taken lightly. Although China has no longer sought to support revolutionary movements as it did during the Cold War, other states continue to distrust its political intentions. Liberal democratic states in particular do not wish to see China grow strong enough to challenge the liberal world order. Aaron Friedberg (2011) goes as far as to say that the United States must prepare itself for the worst until China becomes a liberal democracy, for only then can the former learn to live with the latter as the preponderant power in East Asia and call home its legions. His

analysis has incorporated liberal democratic insights. In his words, “if we permit an illiberal China to displace us as the preponderant player in this most vital region, we will face grave dangers to our interests and our values throughout the world” (Friedberg, 2011, p. 8). Friedberg also seems to think that only liberal democracies can coexist peacefully. Evidence from Europe, for instance, further suggests that “nationalist passions, territorial disputes, and arms races [over there] were fast dwindling into historical memory” (Friedberg, 2011, p. xiii). The rise of China is tolerated by Western powers, especially the United States, as long as Beijing continues to remain integrated into the world economy. But as long as China remains illiberal, it will still be regarded as a source of threat to liberal states.

Democratic states have now engaged in the process of countering the threat of China. The United States seeks to strengthen its relations with other democracies with the aim of forming a counterweight to the Asian state. According to Carlyle Thayer (2011), “U.S. strategic interests in Southeast Asia have remained relatively constant over the past 65 years,” including maintaining “a security order based on alliances, designed to prevent any power, regional or external, from exerting hegemony over the region” (p. 316). He cites the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy, which states that “alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand [all of which are democratic states to varying degrees] are the bedrock of security in Asia and a foundation of prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region” (Thayer, 2011, p. 329).

Chinese leaders are no doubt well aware of how states in the region will respond if it chooses to pursue hegemonic-power status aggressively. They made no substantial politico-strategic gains by supporting communist insurgencies that threatened the security of political regimes in Asia during the Cold War, nor will its current threatening behavior advance its future geostrategic interests. The fact that states in the region have adopted multiple strategies to manage the rise of China as evident in the two publications under review shows how China has been kept in check.

We are thus likely to see a rising China that wants to throw its weight around from time to time because of its need to prove to the world that it is a power to be reckoned with. In the end, Beijing is most likely to take careful steps toward preventing backlashes that undermine its interests and great-power status. If war breaks out in the region, it will not be one between the United States and China, even if the former wants to wage a preventive war against the latter. A series of proxy wars is more likely, as happened during the Cold War.²

But states in Asia seem to have grown more self-confident and more secure because of their economic development and growing military strength. They are likely to maintain a multipronged strategy toward China and the United States by engaging them on the economic and institutional fronts, but getting the United States to help keep China at bay militarily. Future stability in the Asia-Pacific will be based on neither a Sino-centric world order nor American hegemony.³

In short, the rise of China is likely to remain a great source of controversy and debate in the years and decades to come. Still, evidence shows that the giant Asian state is likely to pursue its interests driven by certain hegemonic ambitions as its material power grows and as it becomes more status-conscious. However, its rise has been, and will be, limited by various constraints, one of which is a

pattern of prudent responses from other states in the Asia-Pacific. The region is thus bound to remain stable, China rising but without enjoying the luxury of providing leadership for peaceful regional community building, at least not until it becomes a liberal democracy.⁴

Notes

¹Purchasing power parity is measured in terms of exchange rates as the value of goods and services produced in China valued at prices estimated in the United States.

²During the Cold War, nuclear bipolarity structured by the United States and the Soviet Union may have prevented war between them, as John Mearsheimer (1998) suggests. See his "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War." However, the international system produced numerous proxy wars throughout the developing world.

³It should be noted that liberal democracies appear to be the only type of states that have succeeded in building regional security communities, but they are not set completely free from power-balancing politics among themselves either. Evidently, power balancing among members of regional security communities prevents the latter from becoming regional governments or leviathans. In short, regional security communities do not supplement political realism; they only moderate realist impulses among community member states. See Sorpong Peou (2002, 2009), "Regional Community Building for Better Global Governance" and "Security Community Building in Asia Pacific."

⁴David Kang (2007) argues that future regional stability in East Asia will be based on China being a dominant power. See his *China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia*. This argument overlooks contemporary security politics in the Asian region, however.

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