

## SEEKING POLITICAL RECONCILIATION: CASE STUDIES IN ASIA\*

### INTRODUCTION

*Mumin Chen*

#### Looking Beyond Realism

Since the end of the Cold War, the scholarly community has seen tremendous changes in the meaning of and approaches to security. Security studies today encompass various theoretical propositions, ranging from the “broadening” school that stresses the economic and environmental dimensions of security to the “deepening” approach that challenges the legitimacy of state-centrism and military security. The September 11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing U.S. campaign against international terrorism further strengthened the need for exploring new ways to respond to new and unconventional threats to human lives and welfare.

Yet unlike other regions where scholars and policy makers have shifted their focus of security issues from military to non-

---

\* The author would like to thank Atena Feraru and Alex Littlefield, both Ph.D. students in the Graduate Institute of International Politics, National Chung Hsing University, for their assistance in editing this special issue.

conventional perspectives, security in East and South Asia is still largely defined by realist characteristics. Concerns about security on the Korean peninsula and tensions between India and Pakistan often lead scholars to conclude that military security is the critical element in determining peace or war in both regions, and that maintaining a balance of power among rival players—i.e., the United States, China, Japan, and even India—is the only attainable way to achieve regional stability.

But where does rivalry come from? Realist theorists are often reluctant to discuss this question, as their traditional approach is based on assumptions of an anarchical structure of the international system and the power-driven instinct of sovereign states. Over the years realists have carefully defended their position by adding more conditions such as balance of threat, and differentiating defensiveness from offensiveness.<sup>1</sup> As a result, scholars of Asian security continue to adopt realist assumptions to justify military approaches in responding to rising threats without even asking whether power balancing is the only attainable way to peace and stability. This strategy has been quite effective, as many scholars are convinced that Asia's stability is largely a function of behavior and relations among the major powers.

With a closer look, however, one finds that realism alone is not enough to explain the complicated nature of the security environment in Asia. Simply put, certain developments do not meet realist predictions. For instance, President Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan played brinkmanship during 2004 and 2008 presidential elections by advocating a referendum, an act interpreted by

---

1. For a discussion of the realist paradigm as a self-restraint and defensive research program, see John A. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Program: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91, No. 4 (December, 1997), pp. 899-912. For "balance of threat" concept, see Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987). On the concept of offensive realism, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

both Beijing and Washington as provocative and irresponsible. If it is great powers that decide the security order of East Asia, why did political leaders of Taiwan bother to challenge it? In South Korea, Presidents Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun orchestrated the Sunshine policy toward Pyongyang throughout their tenure, amid the latter's nuclear and missile tests and occasional exchanges of fire between both sides.

An analysis of Asian security also has to take the following facts into consideration:

- East Asia is perhaps the only region in the world where no major war has occurred since the 1970s, when the wars in Indochina and the China-Vietnam war of 1979 were fought. But virtually none of the older military confrontations has disappeared—those on the Korean peninsula, in China-Japan relations, in Taiwan-China relations, and in the South China Sea, for example.
- Compared to the rest of the world, East and South Asian countries have so far enjoyed the highest economic growth rates since the end of the Cold War. One can attribute this achievement to the consensus shared by most leaders in the region that as long as every country commits to developing its economy and trade, immediate threats to peace and security in the region are diminished.
- Both regions of Asia have the most unsolved territorial disputes, and each of them has the potential to escalate into a major international crisis: the China-India border dispute along the Himalayas, the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands in the East China Sea, the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, and the Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan.
- East and South Asia have the most diversified political systems and cultural backgrounds, ranging from the democratic and open societies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, to authoritarian governments embracing capitalism and opening up such as China and Vietnam, and then to the most isolated and oppressive regimes such as North Korea and Burma.

### **Summarizing the Work on Political Reconciliation**

As a matter of fact, international relations scholars have suggested various approaches to analyzing the dynamics of

security issues in Asia, but they either attempt to explain why political hostilities in both regions do not generate military conflicts as realists predicted, or concentrate on how a regional security order can be created and maintained. These studies have enriched our understanding of Asian security, yet they simply follow conventional wisdom by looking for ways to avoid conflict rather than exploring the roots of rivalry between states and groups.<sup>2</sup> Here we suggest a different way to examine the security environment of Asia. That is, we examine various cases involving hostilities between states or within a society in East and South Asia, and determine whether true political reconciliation is attainable.

All six articles selected for this special issue are based on discussions at an international workshop held in Taiwan in October 2009.<sup>3</sup> The original idea was to invite scholars from various countries in Asia to explore the possibilities of analyzing Asian security from a non-realist perspective. Given the impressive amount and quality of recent research on these topics, the workshop wanted to bring together ambitious academics from countries with a direct stake in solving these conflicts, with a view to identifying those policy positions that have proved most fruitful in promoting reconciliation in the past, as well as current

---

2. Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003); J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allan Carson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); William T. Tow, *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John G. Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

3. The workshop was the third in a series of international meetings organized in our collaborative project on "Historical Reconciliation and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia," an idea initiated by Peter Van Ness of the Contemporary China Center of the Australian National University and Mel Gurtov of Portland State University. The Graduate Institute of International Politics, National Chung Hsing University, the Centre for China Studies of National Taiwan University, and the Australian National University co-hosted this event on October 16 and 17, 2009.

opportunities and challenges to confidence building.

Four historical cases were originally selected for discussion in the workshop: reconciliation between China and Japan, Taiwan and Mainland China, North and South Korea, and, within Taiwan, between native Taiwanese and Mainlanders. In this special issue we include two additional cases: China's relations with India and the India-Pakistan dyad. The main arguments in the articles are briefly treated below.

Japan's war responsibilities have long been an important element in China-Japan relations. As the issue of compensation has never been fully resolved, how both countries work together to re-address World War II history and war responsibilities functions as an alternative and perhaps more effective way to promote reconciliation between the two countries. Kawashima Shin's work focuses on the China-Japan Joint History Research, a project first proposed at the foreign ministerial meetings in 2005 and then approved for implementation the following year. The project is by far the most comprehensive plan sponsored by both governments with the purpose of promoting mutual understanding between Chinese and Japanese societies by reconstructing collective memories of World War II. In the words of the author, "the main purpose was to prevent, even if only slightly, the history perception issue blocking both countries' regular exchanges in the political, economic, and cultural arenas through this joint research."

As a participant in this project, Kawashima explains in detail how the project was implemented, how disagreements between both sides gradually surfaced in the process, and why a joint history research may be an effective strategy to promote political reconciliation. Kawashima argues that if both sides expect to act in the spirit of "agreeing to disagree," it can be said that the scholars' work had ultimately succeeded. However, when the research results were presented the Chinese side strongly disagreed with the views from the Japanese side and requested revisions and deletions. Consequently, the final released version amounted to a political compromise, and its potential for promoting mutual understanding was greatly

diminished. The author expresses frustration about the outcome of the project, but also admits to structural asymmetry in such a project, as the Japanese participants are free to conduct research while their Chinese counterparts constantly face pressure from the government.

Failed attempts to construct a common historical perspective also apply to relations between China and Taiwan. Since the Kuomintang (KMT, the Nationalist Party) returned to power in March 2008 and adopted conciliatory measures toward Beijing, tensions across the Taiwan Strait have been significantly reduced. Yet as Yinan He notes in her paper, most predictions on future political dialogue between China and Taiwan are cautious. Beijing leaders today still treat the island as a renegade province, while the general public on Taiwan is eager for recognition by the international community. Her article attributes the absence of a common identity across the Strait to opposite historical perspectives developed on both sides. A lengthy political separation has allowed the people of Taiwan to develop their collective memories and distinctive interpretations of the island's history. The author assumes that collective memories and historical perspectives, whether imaginary or real, will have long-lasting effects on political issues such as national identity and reconciliation.

To further explore how divergent historical views have been constructed and consolidated, He conducted a comparative study by examining the historical records and textbooks published from both sides over four eras: Ancient Taiwan, Dutch colonial rule and the conquest by General Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) in the 17th century, rule of the Qing Empire from 1683 to 1895, and Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945. The author shows that historians from both sides have widely different views on certain historical figures and events—for example, on the Japanese colonial period. Chinese evaluations are predominantly negative, claiming Japan's rule on Taiwan was full of terror, economic exploitation, and discriminatory policies against local people, whereas Taiwanese historians agree that while Japanese rule was oppressive, it also brought modernization to the island and improved the infrastructure. He concludes

from this that a convergent historical perspective is still lacking, as both sides tend to disregard historical materials contradictory to their predetermined themes. To achieve reconciliation, He suggests China and Taiwan together develop joint history study projects to understand each other's beliefs and grievances.

Cheng-feng Shih and Mumin Chen's article focuses on another aspect of Taiwan-China relations—whether the people of Taiwan perceive themselves as Taiwanese or Chinese. For years, the Taiwanese people's ethnic identities were reflected in their views of the island's political status, whether as an independent state or as a Chinese province temporarily separated from the mainland. Shih and Chen discuss how a native Taiwanese identity formed and evolved during Taipei's authoritarian and later democratic periods, and how this native identity clashes with the Chinese identity forged and imposed by the Mainlander elites who came to Taiwan in the late 1940s. They assume the natives' distinctive historical experiences encouraged them to develop a unique identity that later became a force for pushing for the island's political democratization.

What is remarkable in the case of Taiwan is that the political transitions have been rather peaceful; despite the infamous contentions of the two main political parties, hostility has greatly diminished in past decades. Shih and Chen further attribute this reduction of inter-ethnic tension to moderate measures employed by KMT and DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) politicians as Taiwan democratizes. Policies to redress the mistakes of the authoritarian regime of Chiang Kai-shek during the 2-28 Massacre of 1947 indicate the success of transitional justice. Further, politicians of both parties are extremely careful to maintain equality among ethnic groups, which lays the foundation for successful reconciliation.

Jong Kun Choi's article focuses on another long-lasting rivalry with the potential to escalate into war, the confrontation between North and South Korea. From 1998 to 2007, the South Korean government, under the leadership of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, introduced the Sunshine policy toward Pyongyang, with the hope that improvement of relations between North and

South would be a better approach than sanctions to achieving peace and stability on the peninsula. This policy shift fundamentally challenged the conventional strategic thought in South Korean society that containment of a dictatorial and militarized regime in Pyongyang is the smartest response to threats from the North. This policy experiment is noteworthy because for decades the containment school had prevailed, and conservative groups had been able to maintain a strong and consistent voice advocating for a tougher position toward Pyongyang. Moreover, the engagement policy might undermine South Korea's relations with the United States.

Choi explores how the Kim and Roh governments constructed a new identity based on seeking coexistence and reconciliation—rather than unification and military confrontation—with North Korea, and promoted this idea to voters. This policy experiment faced tremendous criticism from conservative groups, and inevitably established two political camps: Sunshine supporters and their opponents. The author describes how political leaders bravely initiated a new security identity and how this identity survived in such a hostile environment. Bear in mind that during this decade of inter-Korean summits and exchanges, the North conducted nuclear and missile tests, and that Kim's and Roh's party remained a minority in the National Assembly.

Although the Sunshine policy did not achieve a truly inter-Korean reconciliation, Choi argues that rejection of war as a means to resolve the North Korean problem is now a fixed ideational feature of both the engagement and the containment camps. War-aversion as the legacy of the engagement policy has encouraged the public to develop a new identity toward Pyongyang. Today no political party openly advocates military means to counter Pyongyang's delinquent behavior, which may help explain why South Korean society was so self-restrained during the *Cheonan* incident.

China-India relations have drawn considerable media attention since both are nuclear powers and are rising economic stars. On the other hand, the relationship is still shadowed by a series of quarrels ranging from disputed borders to Tibet's status and

support of the Dalai Lama. In fact, if we read media reports or web blogs from both sides, we might jump to the conclusion that both countries are at each other's throats. How these two rising powers accommodate their respective "rises" poses a great challenge to their leaders. Shen Dingli's article presents a relatively optimistic perspective in interpreting China-India relations. Despite the structural constraints, Shen indicates that political leaders from both sides have taken steps to reconcile their relations by assigning high priority to peaceful coexistence. Their growing trade, at around \$60 billion a year, also contributes to an evolving partnership.

Shen expands his argument by examining political, strategic, security, and economic aspects of the bilateral relationship. The evidence of reconciliation is revealed in Beijing's attitude toward India's bid to becoming a new member of the United Nations Security Council. For China, India is more qualified than Japan as it represents over one billion people and has consistently maintained an independent foreign policy. Even in the border dispute, there has been significant progress, as two treaties with regard to reducing tensions were signed in 1993 and 1996, followed by another agreement in 2005 on the political parameters and guiding principles for settling the boundary question. The growing reconciliation between India and China, Shen concludes, will make it unlikely for either side to form a bilateral alliance with a third party (i.e., the United States) against the other.

The prospects for improvements in India's relations with its other neighbor, Pakistan, are less optimistic. Raviprasad Narayanan provides his observations on the most protracted and unsettled dispute in Asia, one that (as he puts it) has included three and a half wars. Scholars often attribute the conflicts to the power-maximizing nature of both these post-colonial states, but these analyses ignore the security discourses prevailing in both societies. In fact, political leaders from New Delhi and Islamabad are constantly caught in a "security dilemma" and will try hard to overwhelm each other by either imposing excessive security measures on their societies or by exaggerating the military threat

from other side.

To better understand the nature of the India-Pakistan dyad, Narayanan proposes to abandon a conventional state-to-state or unit-level analysis, and to incorporate historical, cultural, social, and religious factors to develop a more comprehensive approach. As his article indicates, India-Pakistan relations comprise a series of issues ranging from conventional sources of conflict such as territorial claims and nuclear deterrence to nonconventional security issues such as terrorism and human trafficking. But in addition, the processes of state formation in the post-colonial era encouraged the emergence of certain identities based upon “antagonism of the other.” Islamization of Pakistan and the rise of Hindu fundamentalist groups in India further contribute to this “mutual threat perception,” and make it difficult for leaders in both countries to break out of the spiraling security-dilemma.

Lack of mutual trust between India and Pakistan, argues Narayanan, explains why the attempts to build cooperative regimes and agree on confidence-building measures have been largely unsuccessful. He also indicates that both India and Pakistan are facing more “internal” rather than “external” threats today—non-state actors such as Maoist guerillas in India and the Taliban in Pakistan are undermining the legitimacy of both governments through the imposition of new ideologies. This reshaping of power relations in the subcontinent will perhaps change the nature of India-Pakistan relations as well as the perceptions of threat.

### **Some Common Themes**

The authors do not have a common analytical framework. Nor did they coordinate their research effort. These articles have diverse research methodologies, ranging from interpretations of historical archives to personal observations to strategic analyses. Yet we may draw common themes from them. First, China’s strategic intentions and long-lasting rivalries are two of the most challenging and unpredictable factors in Asian security. Thus,

any proposal for improving the future security environment in East and South Asia must take these issues into consideration. Second, although many of the rivalries can be explained by realist theory, such as China-Taiwan relations and China-Japan relations, lack of mutual trust and collective identity are perhaps more fundamental causes of ongoing disputes.

Third, political leaders, whether democratically elected or not, must take responsibility for the ups and downs of political relations with rival states or groups. They are in a position to convince people to accept the chosen course, whether confrontational or conciliatory. In the case of Taiwan, political leaders successfully altered the political agenda by recognizing the responsibility for the 2-28 massacre; in South Korea, leaders shifted to an engagement strategy toward Pyongyang. These moves fundamentally changed the direction of state policies and greatly reduced tensions within or between states.

The authors make concrete and realistic proposals at different levels. Some suggest that political leaders initiate or continue the course toward reconciliation via joint history research projects, such as between China and Japan and between China and Taiwan. Other authors suggest putting aside unsolvable issues and concentrating on confidence-building mechanisms, as between China and India, or shifting the focus of policy making from external threats to domestic problems, as in the India-Pakistan case.

In conclusion, there is general agreement among Asian scholars that all countries want to cooperate on building peaceful relationships of mutual benefit. It is time to abandon realist power balancing and look for alternative ways to achieve security. Reconciliation of historical differences is a fundamental requirement for successful cooperation. The cases examined in this special issue imply that people have made certain achievements in recent years, but that more challenges lie ahead.

### Principal References

- Alagappa, Muthiah, ed. *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Ikenberry, G. John and Michael Mastanduno, eds. *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
- Suh, J. J., Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allan Carson, eds. *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Tow, William T. *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Vasquez, John A. "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Program: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91, No. 4 (December, 1997), pp. 899-912.
- Walt, Stephen. *The Origins of Alliance*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987.