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Acharya, Amitav.

International Security, Volume 28, Number 3, Winter 2003/04,  
pp. 149-164 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press



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# Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?

Amitav Acharya

Post-Cold War debates about Asian security have been dominated by Aaron Friedberg's influential image of a region seemingly "ripe for rivalry."<sup>1</sup> Friedberg stressed Asia's lack of stability-enhancing mechanisms of the kind that sustains peace in Europe, such as its high levels of regional economic integration and regional institutions to mitigate and manage conflict. Other pessimists foresaw regional disorder stemming from Asian states' attempts to balance a rising China. Taken together, such views have shaped a decade of thinking about Asian security in academic and policy circles.

Now, in a recent article in *International Security* entitled "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," David Kang offers an alternative view that is both timely and provocative. Kang finds that "Asian states do not appear to be balancing against . . . China. Rather they seem to be bandwagoning" (p. 58). He then presents an indigenous Asian tradition that could sustain regional order: the region's historical acceptance of a "hierarchical" interstate order with China at its core. "Historically," Kang suggests, "it has been Chinese weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved. East Asian regional relations have historically been hierarchic, more peaceful, and more stable than those in the West" (p. 66). After faulting Western scholarship for taking an essentially Eurocentric approach to Asian security, Kang calls for bringing international relations theory more in tune with Asian realities. He also asserts that scholars should strive for a better match between their theoretical tools and the evidence on the ground. Taking cognizance of Asia's different pathway to national sovereignty and regional order, Kang argues, would open the door to new and exciting ad-

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I thank David Capie, Paul Evans, Sumit Ganguly, Brian Job, Alastair Iain Johnston, Jack Snyder, and participants in a seminar at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in May 2003 for their comments and suggestions.

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1. David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 57-85; and Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5-33. Further references to Kang's article appear parenthetically in the text.

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*International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter 2003/04), pp. 149-164  
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vances for the study of Asian security, which in turn would enrich the field of international relations more generally.

Kang's view that East Asia's past will guide and ensure its future stability boldly challenges Friedberg's thesis about "Europe's past" becoming "Asia's future."<sup>2</sup> While sharing Kang's dismissal of the pessimists' view, I have serious reservations about his evidence and argumentation about an alternative pathway to Asian security order. Kang is better at explaining where the pessimists have gone wrong than why they have gone wrong. And his idea of Asia's return to a hierarchical order is confusing and dangerous.

Contrary to Kang's argument, Asia's future will not resemble its past. Instead of sliding into anarchy or organizing itself into a pre-Westphalian hierarchy, Asia is increasingly able to manage its insecurity through shared regional norms, rising economic interdependence, and growing institutional linkages: precisely the kind of mechanisms that the "ripe for rivalry" thesis underestimates. In the following sections, I develop this argument as an alternative to the perspectives of both Friedberg and Kang.

### *Is the Evidence Compelling?*

It is hard to refute the argument that Asians are not balancing China, but are bandwagoning, if it is not based on precise conceptions about what balancing and bandwagoning entail. Neorealist theory identifies two types of balancing behavior: internal balancing (national self-help), including military buildup directed against a rising power; and external balancing, which may involve either the strengthening of old alliances or the forging of new ones, directed against the rising power.

There is considerable evidence that one Asian state is balancing China: India. Kang conveniently excludes South Asia from his analysis. Presumably, South Asian security dynamics have no bearing on East Asian security. This is difficult to justify in view of India's rising power and role in Asian security. India is seeking closer ties with Burma to counter growing Chinese influence there. India and the United States have conducted naval patrols in the Strait of Malacca to counter piracy and terrorism. Both U.S. and Indian government officials see India's security role in Southeast Asia as a means for balancing China. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognizes In-

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2. Aaron L. Friedberg, "Europe's Past, Asia's Future?" SAIS Policy Forum Series, No. 3 (October 1998).

dia's role as a possible counterweight to any potential future threat from China, inviting India to become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Given this nexus, there can be no meaningful discussion of the East Asian balance of power without consideration of India's role.

Assertions that East Asian states are not balancing China must also be weighed against the emphasis on air and naval weapons in the military buildup by the ASEAN states and Japan. It has been spurred, at least partly, by China's growing power. Moreover, even though China may not be the sole reason for the revitalization of the U.S. alliances with Japan, Australia, and the Philippines, it is an important factor. Manila's new security ties with Washington are partly geared to addressing its fear of China's military encroachment into the Spratly Islands, especially those claimed by the Philippines. To make the case that Asian countries are not balancing China, Kang needs to offer alternative interpretations and explanations for Asia's arms modernization and alliance strengthening.

Kang's argument that Asian countries may actually be bandwagoning with China is more problematic.<sup>3</sup> Such assertions need to be supported by specific indicators of how to judge bandwagoning behavior.

The meaning of bandwagoning remains contested in the theoretical literature of international security. For Stephen Walt, bandwagoning implies acquiescence to a rising power by a state threatened by it (appeasement). For Randall Schweller, bandwagoning implies opportunistic jumping over to the side of the rising power.<sup>4</sup> There is little evidence that either kind of bandwagoning is taking place in Asia.

A reasonable indicator of Asian bandwagoning behavior would be a state's decision to align itself militarily with China. Yet no East Asian country has done so with the possible exceptions of Burma and North Korea. In these cases, the strategic links predate the economic and military rise of China. Kang cites the growing bilateral trade volumes and investment (as well as a reluctance to get involved in a fight over Taiwan) as evidence for bandwagoning by countries such as Japan. By doing so, however, he confuses economic self-interest with bandwagoning. There are good economic reasons for East Asian states to pursue economic ties with China, but these do no amount to defer-

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3. Incidentally, if Kang's observation is correct, then he may actually be reinforcing, rather than challenging, Friedberg's pessimism.

4. See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72-107.

ence. Japan's economic ties with China are based on rationalist, absolute gains logic—investments in China combined with free riding with U.S. power. But Japan has not forsaken its balancing option, as the 1997 Revised Guidelines that revitalized Japan's military alliance with the United States would attest. This is a major development overlooked in Kang's analysis.

Kang holds that "threats arise through the mere existence of capabilities" (p. 75). Hence, "by realist standards, China should be provoking balancing behavior, merely because its overall size and projected rates of growth are so high" (p. 64). But if size, military power, and growth rates were the only things that matter, surely the United States should be the one being balanced against. Realists would note that Kang's analysis ignores insights from Walt's balance of threat theory, which shows that states balance against threats and not simply against power. For this author, Kang's analysis also disregards the fact that no ASEAN state has the capability to manage an internal balancing of China, while external balancing essentially means increasing dependence on the U.S. security umbrella, a potentially costly option in domestic terms.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the United States has not been an altogether reliable security guarantor in Southeast Asia.

For China's neighbors, its rise is worrisome, but not a threat that requires aggressive balancing responses that would expose them to the perils of security dependency. Yet suspicions of China remain sufficiently strong to prevent opportunistic bandwagoning in which a state's political and military alignments would correspond closely with its economic linkages with China. This dilemma has pushed Southeast Asian states toward a posture of "engagement." This, however, is neither balancing nor bandwagoning. Kang himself refuses to equate engagement ("soft balancing") with balancing (p. 70). Neither can engagement be viewed as bandwagoning because it does not involve abandoning the military option vis-à-vis China. As Schweller and Wohlforth note, "Until engagement proves an unqualified success . . . the threat of force must be present."<sup>6</sup>

The balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy is too limited to capture the range of choices a state has in responding to a rising power. ASEAN is wary of balancing strategies that are simply infeasible without creating significant de-

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5. Amitav Acharya, "Containment, Engagement, or Counter-Dominance? Malaysia's Response to the Rise of Chinese Power," in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of a Rising Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 129–151.

6. Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War," *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring 2000), p. 82.

pendence on the United States. ASEAN's traditional goal has been to prevent any outside power from acquiring too much influence over any country in the region or the region as a whole.<sup>7</sup> In reality, ASEAN countries do not want to have to choose between the United States and China. Although aspects of ASEAN's attitude (as well as the attitudes of South Korea and Japan) toward China may be described as "hedging"—a situation in which states are not sure whether to balance, bandwagon, or remain neutral—in reality, ASEAN is pursuing "double-binding." This involves a conscious effort by ASEAN to enmesh both China and the United States in regional interdependence and institutions so as to induce moderation on the part of China and increase the cost of Chinese use of force. At the same time, it would discourage the United States from pursuing strategies of containment, which ASEAN sees as dangerous and counterproductive.<sup>8</sup>

### *Hierarchy: Historical Record and Contemporary Appeal*

Kang's suggestion that Asia may be heading toward a hierarchical regional order that, if the past were any guide, would ensure stability is an interesting and intriguing possibility that deserves closer scrutiny. The notion of hierarchy has its basis in both structural realist theory and Asian cultural tradition. Kenneth Waltz views a hierarchical order as a system in which "political actors are formally differentiated according to degrees of their authority."<sup>9</sup> For Barry Buzan and Richard Little, hierarchy is a "political structure in which units relate in a subordinate-superordinate relationship."<sup>10</sup> David Lake distinguishes between four types of hierarchical institutions: spheres of influence, protectorates, informal empires, and empires.<sup>11</sup>

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7. I have called this posture "counter-dominance." See Acharya, "Containment, Engagement, or Counter-Dominance?" Past examples of this approach include the willingness of Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1980s to negotiate with Vietnam for a diplomatic settlement of the Cambodia conflict in return for Hanoi's willingness to reduce its dependence on the Soviet Union, and ASEAN's move in granting membership to Burma so as to lessen its strategic dependence on China.

8. On institutional binding in Asia, see Amitav Acharya, "Regional Institutions and Security Order: Norms, Identity, and Prospects for Peaceful Change," in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).

9. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Political Structures," in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 73.

10. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 440.

11. David A. Lake, "Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 129–160.

Kang's notion of hierarchy is not grounded in the available theoretical literature. Neither does he offer a sense of what such an order might look like. The principal reference point for a hierarchical order in East Asia is the classical Chinese world order (from the Tang to early Qing dynasties).<sup>12</sup> This order was underpinned by a belief that "China was the superior centre and its ruler had duties toward all other rulers as his inferiors."<sup>13</sup> This notion of hierarchy stood in marked contrast to the European system of nation-states "equal in sovereignty and mutually independent within the cultural area of Christendom."<sup>14</sup> Although the Chinese order featured such benevolent ideas as the "impartiality" of the emperor (that China did not "discriminate among foreign countries and treated everyone equally"<sup>15</sup>), this did not mean that they were "equal to the emperor, but they were equal in the eyes of the emperor."<sup>16</sup>

Did this order produce peace and stability as Kang suggests? The evidence is mixed at best. First, the order did not rest on any intrinsic Chinese tendency for peaceful management of its relations with neighbors. Despite its supposedly moral underpinnings such as "impartiality" and "inclusiveness," the Chinese world order actually operated on the basis of a pragmatic realpolitik, with power and security being major considerations and force being an important instrument.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese did acknowledge the status of overseas rulers whom they could not subjugate by force (such as the Han emperors in dealing with the Xiongnu federation, Tang rulers with Tibet, and Song rulers with Mongols). Against lesser states, the Chinese did not refrain from threatening or using force. The Ming emperor Yongle invaded Vietnam, reversing his father's edict not to attack certain neighbors. China's use of force, which was mostly limited to frontier areas such as Vietnam, is explained by a lack of capability, rather than imperial benevolence; where the Chinese did have the capability, they had no hesitation in resorting to force. In general, Yongle maintained an

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12. John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). A new body of work that emphasizes Chinese realpolitik has challenged this earlier notion of a Chinese world order emphasizing Confucian virtues, such as the emperor's impartiality and benevolence toward tributary states. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

13. John K. Fairbank, "Introduction," in Denis Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 10: *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911*, Pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 30.

14. Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, p. 9.

15. Wang Gungwu, "China's Overseas World," in Wang, *To Act Is to Know: Chinese Dilemmas* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), p. 306.

16. Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia," in Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, p. 50.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

“aggressive policy towards China’s neighbours overseas,”<sup>18</sup> while his famed admiral, Zheng He, “did intervene in local politics in Sumatra as well as Ceylon.”<sup>19</sup> Commenting on the Qing dynasty’s relations with its neighbors, Warren Cohen writes, “With lesser powers, when they perceived force to be effective, as with the Zungaris and Nepalese, they did not refrain from applying it as ruthlessly as circumstances required.”<sup>20</sup> As Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross note, “The Chinese are capable of peace as well as war, and cultural precedent does not tell us which they will prefer.”<sup>21</sup>

Given this historical record, what would then lead modern Asian states to accept a hierarchical regional system with China at its core? Kang, much like Samuel Huntington and Friedberg, assumes the neo-Confucianist culturalist claim that “Asians accept hierarchy.”<sup>22</sup> But this notion of hierarchy devolves into an essentialist and orientalist notion, both for individual states (that “know” where they belong) and regionally (there is something inherently Asian/Chinese going on that states in the system understand). Although some sense and process of hierarchy is an essential component of a regional order, to regard this as a central organizing framework for Asian security is highly problematic.

The reasons for this are both material as well as ideational, and they underscore major differences between Asia’s current security predicament and the hierarchical Chinese order of the past. Structurally, the latter was possible because China was the only available power that its neighbors could turn to if they had to seek security against their rivals. Today there are other relatively powerful actors in Asia that can offer a security umbrella to the region’s weaker states. Most important, there can be no bandwagoning in Asia (hence no East Asian hierarchy) without China usurping or balancing U.S. power. But if China tries this, the obvious consequence is greater competition and rivalry in Asia, producing the sort of instability that would undermine Kang’s optimism about Asia’s security order.

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18. Wang, “China’s Overseas World,” p. 302.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

20. Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 243–244.

21. Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and Empty Fortress: China’s Search for Security* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 21.

22. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 234; and Friedberg, “Europe’s Past, Asia’s Future?” p. 9. Friedberg was quoting Kishore Mahbubani, a Singapore foreign ministry official. Kishore Mahbubani, “The Pacific Impulse,” *Survival*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 117.

Material power aside, China does not enjoy supremacy over cultural ideas underpinning regional order. Hierarchy, like hegemony in the Gramscian sense, can have material as well as ideational dimensions. Some might see Confucian culture (sometimes expressed as “Asian values”) as the glue that could bind China with the region. But Asia’s cultural and political diversity ensures that Confucian socialization would not have a widespread impact. Except in Vietnam, classical China never extended its ideational leadership over Southeast Asia. Indian ideas were far more important catalysts of cultural and political interaction and change in Southeast Asia than Chinese ones; in fact, they influenced China itself. Today Asia has a vastly greater range of sources of political and strategic ideas to draw from, including those from the West. China has neither the regional social capital nor the ideological appeal to dominate the region’s ideational landscape. Instead it seems to be following Southeast Asia’s soft authoritarian tradition and ASEAN’s consensual diplomatic approach.

Hierarchy is difficult to reconcile with the overwhelming identification of Asian countries with Westphalian norms of sovereign equality and non-interference. Indeed China itself does not talk about Sinocentric or tribute systems of old. This does not mean that the Chinese government has so deeply internalized expectations of deference that there is no need for it to be demanded or discussed. Instead China uses Westphalian language to stake its claims to territory and sovereignty. Moreover, there is a tension between Chinese acceptance of hierarchy and the manner of China’s engagement with multilateral institutions, where China prides itself for being the defender of the have-nots of the world. Although demanding to be consulted, China has rarely tried to dominate multilateral institutions as would befit a great power seeking a hierarchical order.

China’s neighbors actually seem to fear rather than favor hierarchical regional orders. A Burmese delegate to the Asian Relations Conference held in 1947, arguably the first attempt at creating a regional organization in Asia, summed up the reasons why there was no possibility of a permanent regional body emerging from the conference: “It was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power.”<sup>23</sup> He was referring to the possible emergence of an Asian regional organization dominated by either India or China.

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23. Cited in William Henderson, “The Development of Regionalism in Southeast Asia,” *International Organization*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Autumn 1955), p. 466.

Kang himself suggests that "South Korea and Vietnam are known for their stubborn nationalism, gritty determination, and proud history as countries independent from China" (p. 79). If so, why should they bandwagon with China? Kang asserts that "it would probably be more surprising if they tried to balance against China by siding with the United States than it would be if they found a means of accommodating Beijing" (ibid.). How so? Should not the nationalism of its neighbors be directed as much against China as against the United States, especially given China's historical record of intervention in Vietnam as well as its proximity and its rising might?

Although regional actors may find a "strong and stable" China preferable given the likely regional spillover effects of its political and economic disintegration, it is a significant leap of faith to assert that a regional hierarchy dominated by China would necessarily and automatically be peaceful and as such accepted as legitimate by other regional actors. For such an asymmetric order to be peaceful, it must be managed, rather than dependent on Chinese benevolence (a culturalist assumption). Realists might see this "management" as a function of a U.S.-led balance of power. Liberals and constructivists would see management through interdependence, norms, and institutions.

### *Why Asia Is Not "Ripe for Rivalry"*

The larger point I make here is that Western realist pessimism need not be countered by Asian cultural historicism. A more credible answer to the former is to be found at the foundational levels of Asia's security order, especially economic interdependence and norms that have helped to mitigate asymmetries in the regional power structure and preserve stability.

Kang rightly recognizes Asia's growing interdependence as a force for stability, but he wrongly takes it to be a pathway to hierarchy. In reality, the interdependence that binds Southeast Asia with China, Japan, and the United States constrains Chinese strategic options. At the height of the cross-strait crisis over controversial remarks of President Lee Deng Hui that Taiwan's ties with mainland China could be characterized as "state-to-state" relations, an editorial in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* noted the chief reason why it thought the mainland could not retaliate against Taipei with force. The *Journal* argued, "Once war breaks out in the Taiwan Strait, the bulk of China's economic achievements that have been built up painstakingly over the last 20 years will become history and China's national fate will henceforth be reversed. . . . Even after it has wrest control of Taiwan, China's coastal provinces

and even Hong Kong—left in ruins by the conflict—will have to be rebuilt. . . . Is Beijing really willing to go to war at such expense?”<sup>24</sup>

Realists see asymmetric interdependence in Asia, such as that between China and Southeast Asia today, as a potential source of conflict. But interdependence fostered by Japanese investments in the 1980s and 1990s did not become the source of Asian disorder that Friedberg had predicted.<sup>25</sup> Instead, scholars and policymakers now know that Japan’s economic relations with East Asia could be managed through a normative and institutional framework. Similarly, Sino-ASEAN interactions are being managed in a way that stresses interdependence and mutual benefit, not hierarchy and preeminence. These are principles underpinning recent initiatives that include a declaration of a code of conduct in the South China Sea and a proposed China-ASEAN free trade area. Indeed, Sino-ASEAN relations have proven to be much more stable than the pessimists predicted a decade ago.

Today Asian regional institutions are important sites of interaction between China and its neighbors. Hence the prospects for a hierarchical regional order can scarcely be ascertained without examining the potential of these institutions to act as a building block for such an order. Yet regional institutions merit merely a footnote in Kang’s analysis, which is limited to bilateral relationships. For someone who rejects realist pessimism, Kang appears, surprisingly, to offer a selective version of realism, in which the only factors that appear to count are the basic structural parameters relevant to traditional (military, territorial, external) security. His article gives little space to how the economic dimensions of power affect the behavior of states, and especially the role of norms and institutions.

Friedberg contrasts Europe’s “thick alphabet soup” of regional institutions with Asia’s “thin gruel.”<sup>26</sup> Asian institutions have not taken the supranational path of the European Union. Instead, they have been sovereignty conforming. The EU emerged because the nation-state was blamed for two major catastrophic wars. Asian norms and institutions were shaped by decolonization at a time when the main concern of regional actors was to preserve the modern nation-state as a permanent feature of the Asian political order. Both Kang and Friedberg miss the extent to which this “thin gruel” is a dietary preference, de-

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24. *Hong Kong Economic Journal* editorial, July 19, 1999, translated as “Too Much for China to Lose,” *Straits Times*, July 22, 1999, p. 46.

25. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry,” pp. 20–21.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

signed to preserve hard-earned sovereignty, rather than a primordial cultural trait of Asian states and societies.

Asia's "late" (compared to Europe) development of a regional organization, which has been highlighted by pessimists, does not mean an absence of shared norms from the outset of the postcolonial period. The distinction between "norm" and "organization" (formal and informal) is important here. A norm is defined as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity."<sup>27</sup> Norms are principles of conduct, whereas organizations are "purposive entities . . . capable of monitoring activity and of reacting to it, and are deliberately set up and designed by states. They are bureaucratic organizations, with explicit rules and specific assignments of rules to individuals and groups."<sup>28</sup> The reason why Asia has had no European-style institutions has a lot to do with the norms of sovereignty developed in the early aftermath of World War II. At the conference of Asian and African states held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, a decision was taken not to bureaucratize regional cooperation because it might undermine the hard-earned sovereignty of the new states.<sup>29</sup> The "basic aim" of that conference was "the formulation and establishment of certain norms for the conduct of present-day international relations and the instruments for the practical application of these norms."<sup>30</sup> The latter, focusing heavily on the preservation of sovereignty and noninterference, were reproduced and institutionalized within ASEAN in 1967 and later in the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994, underscoring a remarkable degree of path dependence in Asian institution building that has received scant recognition.

In short, Asian multilateral conferences and institutions helped to embed the Westphalian norms of independence, reciprocity, equality, and noninterference within regional diplomatic and security practice. As a result, Asian regionalism, unlike its European variant, has not been transformative. Instead it has been conservative and norm preserving. And noninterference has been especially well preserved. However ineffective they may seem since the 1997 Asian

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27. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), p. 251.

28. Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989), p. 34.

29. For further development of this argument, see Amitav Acharya, "The Evolution of Norms: The Social Construction of Non-Interference in Asian Regionalism," paper presented at the Forty-fourth Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Portland, Oregon, February 25–March 1, 2003.

30. Roselan Abdulghani, *The Bandung Spirit: Moving on the Tide of History* (Jakarta: Badan Penerbit, 1964), p. 103.

economic crisis, Asian regional institutions espousing Westphalian norms have contributed to regional stability.<sup>31</sup> Even Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, belonging to the pessimist camp, acknowledged, “The Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) states have constructed a durable security regime that has allowed them to solve and demilitarise a variety of disputes between them.”<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, this normative framework, despite suffering periodic violations that led to strife, has helped states to adjust relatively peacefully to changes in the regional balance of power. It is no coincidence that Asian regionalist interactions based on these norms have been especially strong at the time of significant power shifts. The Asian Relations and Bandung conferences occurred during the retrenchment of the colonial powers. The consolidation of ASEAN followed the British and U.S. withdrawals from the region and the reunification of Vietnam in the 1970s. The Soviet and U.S. force withdrawals in Asia and the rise of China in the early 1990s prompted ASEAN to deepen security cooperation and help launch the ARF.

This pattern may seem to vindicate realist claims that international institutions matter only when great powers are not around to constrain them. But this void-filling role of regional institution building is not to be dismissed, especially because great power retrenchments are a recurring phenomenon in international relations in general and Asian security in particular. Hence, one must seriously doubt the realist tendency to hype the role of the United States in the maintenance of Asian regional order at the expense of regional norms and institutions. Consider the security predicament of Southeast Asia’s anticomunist states in the 1970s, when the British decision to withdraw its forces “east of Suez” was followed by the Nixon doctrine. The doctrine signaled a U.S. policy of noninvolvement in Southeast Asian conflicts and urged greater self-reliance on the part of its Asian allies. If Singapore or Malaysia were then subjected to aggression by Indonesia (similar to President Sukarno’s attack on Malaysia during the 1963–66 period), would the United States have come to its aid? ASEAN cooperation under a new, regionalist Indonesian leadership was critical in avoiding further instability in maritime Southeast Asia. Similarly, in the early 1990s, ASEAN members involved in the Spratly Islands dispute could

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31. Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*; and Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2001).

32. Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, “Rethinking East Asian Security,” *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer 1994), p. 11.

not realistically expect U.S. intervention on their side had China decided to take over islands claimed by them. The development of an ASEAN-China security dialogue at the time did much to diffuse tensions and preserve stability in Southeast Asia.

Moreover, regional interactions have kept Asian states away from extreme responses to balance of power shifts such as containment or outright bandwagoning—responses that could aggravate the security dilemma. In the early 1990s, Asian leaders such as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew argued strongly against U.S. containment of China and supported engagement. The decision by Southeast Asians not to share the alarmist view of China's rise found among some segments of the U.S. policy establishment, and their desire not to choose between the United States and China, have helped to delegitimize the containment approach. They are also reasons why dire predictions of post-Cold War Asian instability (which might have resulted from policies of balancing or bandwagoning with China) have not materialized.

Asia's conservative norms are increasingly being blamed for the region's failure to address transnational challenges such as financial crises, infectious diseases, and terrorism. But any shift is likely to be slow and path dependent, and not lead to the creation of a regional hierarchy. To be sure, China gets much attention from its neighbors in Asian intergovernmental forums and dialogues. But these forums and dialogues, including the ARF, ASEAN Plus Three, and the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific, aim to bind China into a regional framework to restrain Beijing at a time of its rising power, and not to allow it to dominate them or shape their agenda unilaterally. If the absence of Chinese participation would render Asian regional groupings meaningless, Chinese assertiveness would ensure their collapse. Hence ASEAN remains in the "driver's seat" of the ARF, setting its agenda and direction. China itself favors keeping it that way.

### *Bringing Asia In: Are Asians That Different?*

No one familiar with the Western literature on Asian security would fail to appreciate the need for more theorizing about Asian security that is more faithful to the Asian experience. Moreover, one can readily agree with Kang's view that the realist-liberal-constructivist debates in international relations theory are not always interesting or helpful. That both Kang and I reject the pessimistic view of Asian security order, but have serious disagreements over an alterna-

tive framework, suggests the need for debates, dialogues, and synthesis within as well as across paradigms.

Assuming a benign Asian hierarchy and seeking evidence to fit this cultural historicist straitjacket, however, is not the answer. Kang rightly asserts that “focusing exclusively on Asia’s differences [from the West] . . . runs the risk of essentializing the region, resulting in the sort of orientalist analysis that most scholars have correctly avoided” (p. 59). Vigorous assertions of Asia’s uniqueness, more pronounced among scholars trained in the area studies tradition, have contributed to a tendency to assert Asia’s liberation from international relations theory, rather than to define its place within it. Yet some of Kang’s own observations, such as “Asia has different historical traditions, different geographic and political realities, and different cultural traditions,” have an exceptionalist ring to them (p. 84). A clearer stand against exceptionalism is needed.

There are two paths to a more fruitful engagement between international relations theory and the Asian experience. Muthiah Alagappa chooses the first when he suggests, “Asia is fertile ground to debate, test, and develop many of these [Western] concepts and competing theories, and to counteract the ethnocentric bias.”<sup>33</sup> But the problem of Western dominance will not disappear by using the Asian empirical record primarily to “test” theories generated by Western scholars. This will merely reinforce the image of area studies as little more than provider of “raw data” to Western theory, whether of the rational choice or the social constructivist variety.<sup>34</sup>

A more useful approach would be to generalize from the Asian experience on its own terms. Even as harsh an opponent of area studies as Robert Bates supports developing “analytic narratives” that marry “local knowledge” with social scientific approaches.<sup>35</sup> This is commendable advice. But if students of Asian security are to make a meaningful contribution to the general international relations literature, they need to go beyond applying formal models to study cultural distinctions that lie at the core of area studies (as Bates urges). They also need to use “local knowledge” to develop general insights and constructs to explain events and phenomena in the outside world. If European and

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33. Muthiah Alagappa, “Introduction,” in Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Perspectives* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 9.

34. Christopher Shea, “Political Scientists Clash Over Value of Area Studies,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 10, 1997, pp. A12–A13.

35. Robert H. Bates, “Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (December 1997), pp. 166–169.

North Atlantic regional politics could be turned into international relations theory, why not Asian regional politics? Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism and James Scott's work on resistance offer important examples of how "local knowledge" can be turned into definitive frameworks for analyzing larger global processes.<sup>36</sup> Asian interdependence and regional institution building are a rich source of similar generalizations.

The new challenge is to contribute to global studies from a regional vantage point without being unduly exceptionalist and without simply applying Western theoretical constructs to ascertain whether they fit Asian experience. In Europe, the English School (on international society) and the Copenhagen School (on the security-identity nexus) offer good examples of how this can be done. They have challenged Americanocentrism without falling into the trap of exceptionalism. At this moment, Asia can claim no distinctive perspective on politics and international relations; there is no New Delhi, Tokyo, or Bangkok School. The development of nonexceptionalist Asian perspectives is important to the meaningful interaction and integration between international relations theory and the analysis of Asian security order.

Finally, the construction of Asian international relations theory requires a shift from country-specific work focusing heavily on the Asian great powers such as China, Japan, and India. Despite his attention to Southeast Asia's responses to China, Kang's analysis is essentially focused on the Northeast Asian subregion. An Asian security studies field can and should draw more from Southeast Asia's pathways to regional order.

### *Conclusion*

David Kang is to be commended for refuting the early pessimistic predictions about Asia's post-Cold War security outlook that have failed to materialize. But his arguments about regional responses to the rise of China, and his concepts of hierarchy (as with balancing and bandwagoning) beg for greater conceptual clarity and explanation. Moreover, one should be wary of his alternative scenarios based on cultural historicist arguments. Important structural and normative differences between the past and the present militate against Asia's return to a neo-Confucian order. The Asian engagement approach to-

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36. Benedict O. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); and James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

ward China should not be confused with bandwagoning and deference. There is no reason to believe that Asia's past hierarchy was peaceful or that Asians today would naturally gravitate toward a hierarchical order. It is equally important not to downplay the noncultural sources of regional order, such as economic interdependence, norms, and institutions, that help Asian states to mitigate intraregional power asymmetries that would otherwise aggravate the security dilemma. Progress in the study of Asian security is contingent on matching theoretical predictions with such drivers of Asian peace and stability, rather than reverting to a cultural past that shows little signs of reappearing on Asia's modern geopolitical horizon.