

Why and How Does Asia Cooperate?

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Muthiah Alagappa's latest book, *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, represents a milestone in the study of security in the Asia-Pacific region. It makes important contributions in two aspects: blending international relations theory with Asian regional studies, and explaining why the Asia-Pacific region has seen increased cooperation instead of conflict. The book does an admirable job with both tasks.

Why Are Mainstream Analysts So Wrong?

Alagappa points out in the introduction that for a while our understanding of Asian security was profoundly influenced by works that explicitly employed generic international relations theory. Using primarily the realist perspective, these works prescribed a pessimistic future for Asian security.¹ Borrowing power transition and balance-of-power theories, these works have argued that the rise of China—as a consequence of the balancing actions by others—will result in greater regional instability. This will in turn result in the classic security dilemma that generates further mistrust and conflict.

Interestingly, the neoliberal perspective—including its neoinstitutional variant—also has had important influence on the study of Asian

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¹See Aaron L. Friedburg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993-94): 5-33; Joseph Nye Jr., "East Asian Security: The Case for Deep Engagement," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (1995): 90-102; Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 149-68; and Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *ibid.* 23, no. 4 (1999): 49-80.

security. Some of these theoretical works argue that precisely because of the lower level of economic integration among Asian countries (as compared to Western Europe), cooperation is harder to come by in the Pacific region. Furthermore, due to lack of effective cooperative mechanisms (such as the European Union), Asian countries are far from achieving institutional integration and thus lasting peace.

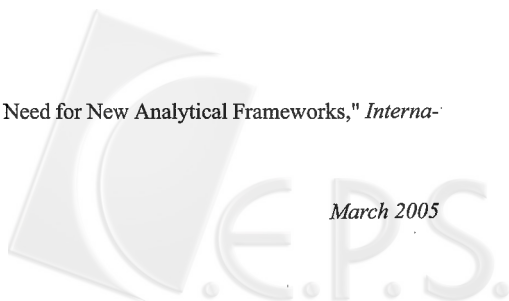
As Alagappa points out, these works that explicitly employ mainstream international relations theory miss the mark, since Asia has not degenerated into the predicted chaos and instability. Instead, Asian countries have seen increasing institutionalization of cooperative regimes, expanding economic ties, and—as a result—extensive peaceful cooperation.

According to Alagappa, the mistakes made by mainstream international relations scholars about Asia are due to their lack of understanding of the deeper dynamics of Asian security. Instead, theories that are mostly developed out of the European context are used indiscriminately to analyze Asia. As David C. Kang recently points out in an important article, we need new analytical frameworks to study Asian security.²

Unfortunately, as Alagappa points out, many studies of Asian security carried out by regional specialists lack sophisticated theoretical analysis of the increasing cooperation in the region. These studies may be empirically informed about the important transformations in the relations among regional countries, yet tend to ignore how general international relations theories can be employed to gain deeper understanding of the processes and dynamics of increased regional cooperation. *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* intends to bridge the gap between theory and regional study by providing new, theoretically-informed understandings of Asian security. The book has done an admirably good job in achieving this goal.

The book argues that there are multiple pathways to achieve order and peace in international relations. The first channel is order through

²David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 57-85.



competition and power, which includes hegemony, balance of power, and concert of power. The second is order through cooperation, which includes collective security, international regimes, and economic interdependence. Third and finally is order through transformation, which includes democratic peace and international integration. Indeed, as Alagappa argues, multiple pathways sustain the present security order in Asia. Hegemony by the United States, balance of power (including alliances), bilateralism, and concert, global, and regional multilateral institutions all play key roles. No single pathway is dominant in the management of Asian security affairs.

The book also analyzes three competing conceptions of Asian security order. The first is hegemony with liberal features that is promoted by Washington, a regional security order that preserves the post-Cold War primacy of the United States and embodies its values. This hegemony incorporates the following elements: American predominance and leadership in the region, development of market-based economies, promotion of human rights and democracy, and a regional security system anchored in the networks of American alliances.

The second conception of Asian security is championed by China. It emphasizes both normative and instrumental means to achieve order. Normatively, China uses its "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (和平共處五原則) to argue that the goal of international order should be to protect state sovereignty and prevent external interference in domestic affairs. Instrumentally, China seeks to achieve a multipolar world that is said to be more peaceful than the hegemonic system that has appeared after the Cold War. To this end, China has sought to establish strategic partnerships with France, Germany, and Russia in order to counterbalance the United States in regional and world affairs.

The third conception of Asian security is the so-called normative-contractual model championed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This conception places emphasis on shared norms and rules in regulating international relations. Moreover, this model places special emphasis on using multilateral institutions to achieve cooperation. Also, the ASEAN conception seeks to use economic integration to promote cooperation among states.

Although Alagappa argues that the three conceptions coexist in the Asia-Pacific region, the book implies that the ASEAN model is gaining influence, as seen by the increased cooperation among regional countries, including both institutional cooperation through multilateral mechanisms and rapidly expanding regional economic ties. The book's central goal is to explain how and why the ASEAN model has generated such an important impact on the region. The answers will be essential for us to understand why Asia has not seen increased conflicts but, instead, has witnessed widespread cooperation.

Theoretical and Analytical Limits

To this end, I believe that the book has achieved only limited success. In order to explain why Asia is largely peaceful and evolving toward greater cooperation, we need to introduce additional analysis and even new theoretical frameworks. Although right in emphasizing the multiple pathways in the creation of the current security situation in Asia, the book is almost entirely focused on regional system-level analysis. For example, various chapters in part two of the book analyze the impact of U.S. hegemony, alliances, regional institutions, rising economic ties, and so on. Left out is one important national-level factor: the role of China.

Indeed, China plays the vital role in defining the regional security situation of Asia. What China does or intends to do both have great impact on not only the stability of the region but also the relations among the regional countries. China's goals, intentions, motives, and policies can therefore profoundly impact what other countries will or will not do. If China is a revisionist state, then regional peace and prosperity will not likely be attained. Indeed, the realist pathway of balance of power and inevitable security dilemma will take over. If, on the other hand, China is willing to pursue its interests through regional cooperative institutions and through shared rules and norms, then the current pattern of increasing cooperation (i.e., the ASEAN model) can be expected to continue or even to flourish.

The same logic also applies to Japan in that its actions and policies will greatly impact how other countries view security in the region. For example, will Japan attempt to become a normal power with a full-size

military (or even nuclear weapons for that matter)? What kind of roles does Tokyo expect to play in Asia? How does Japan perceive its relations with a rising China?

Thus, state-level analysis is critical for understanding Asian security and it is in this respect that the book fails to provide us with answers. The lack of analysis of China is particularly glaring since Beijing has become the critical factor in the newly emerging order of cooperation in Asia. The ASEAN model, or the multilateral mode, has made important progress precisely because China has become more interested in cooperating with regional multilateral institutions. Beijing has broken away from its past distrust of these institutions to become very active in regional multilateral activities. The most important and promising regional cooperative mechanism for Asia today is ASEAN plus Three (APT). China's attitude is critical for the success or failure of APT's institutionalized cooperation between Southeast Asia (represented by ASEAN) and Northeast Asia (represented by China, Japan, and South Korea). China is also active in participating in the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), which is a Track II or non-governmental organization, and Asian Regional Forum (ARF), which is a track I or intergovernmental organization for security cooperation. As Samuel S. Kim has recently pointed out, "Indeed, the rise of China more than any other factor seems to have served as a kind of force multiplier in catalyzing three East Asian regional arrangements: the CSCAP, the ARF, and APT."³

Another deficiency of the book is the lack of emphasis on the economic factor. The neoliberal emphasis on economic interdependence deserves a more prominent place in the volume. Although there is a chapter on the subject by Ming Wan, this neoliberal pathway to cooperation should be treated in more elaborate terms, since expanding economic interdependence among Asian countries is redefining the international relations of the region by providing strong impetus to multilateral and institutionalized

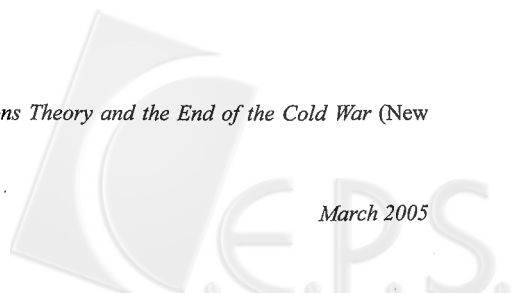
³See Samuel S. Kim, "Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus: Multiple Challenges and Contending Explanations," in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 17.

cooperation. In this regard, the rise of the Chinese economy again plays a central role. The increasing dominance of China in the regional economy has created the need for more cooperation among Asian countries through multilateral arrangements. The recent free trade agreement between China and ASEAN is a clear example of this achievement. Thus the neoliberal pathway deserves more elaborate attention in this book. This pathway may explain more than any other variable the increased efforts by regional countries to construct peace through the multilateral approach.

The third area where the book could have done a better job is the development of new theoretical frameworks to understand the increasing cooperation in Asia. Here, "learning theory" should deserve a special place. Gaining prominence in the field of international relations with the study of the demise of the Soviet Union, learning theory is the result of the inability of either realism or neoliberalism to explain the sudden end of the Cold War. Scholars such as Richard Ned Lebow and his associates believe that learning by decision-makers played a decisive role in the massive increase in cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States and thus the end of the Cold War.⁴

Learning theory emphasizes the evolutionary changes in decision-makers' perceptions of both their national interests and other countries' intentions. If confidence-building measures between countries can result in greater positive perception of each other's intentions, cooperation will follow and even flourish. In the Asian case, recent Chinese eagerness to participate in regional cooperation was largely due to positive learning on the part of Chinese leaders and policy experts. As a result, China has been gradually socialized into the norms of the multilateral approach to international relations (i.e., the ASEAN model of international order). In this aspect, the book should have devoted more attention to issues such as confidence building in Asia and how this has redefined the security perceptions of countries in the region. The book could have benefited from a separate

⁴Richard Ned Lebow, *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).



chapter on the changing values and perceptions by the Chinese leadership toward international relations.

Conclusion

Overall, this book represents a major effort to bring international relations theories into the study of regional security of Asia. It makes an important contribution to the study of why Asia is characterized by prosperity and increasing cooperation, rather than conflict as many predicted in the 1990s. The volume is also successful in highlighting the importance of multiple causes of the current security order in Asia. However, the book's shortcoming is the lack of state-level analysis, especially the critical role of China in the current security pattern of the region. Also, more attention should have been paid to the growing importance of economic interdependence in Asia, which has become a driving engine of the institutionalization of multilateral cooperation in the region. Finally, additional theoretical frameworks, aside from the realist and neoliberal approaches used by the book, could have provided better explanations of why Asia is experiencing increasing cooperation. To this end, learning theory, by emphasizing evolutionary changes in decision-makers' values and perceptions, should be particularly useful.

