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What Is It that Best Explains the East Asian Peace Since 1979? A Call for a Research Agenda

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WHAT IS IT THAT BEST EXPLAINS THE EAST ASIAN PEACE SINCE 1979? A CALL FOR A RESEARCH AGENDA*

Stein Tønnesson

This article discusses how historians and social scientists may go about seeking to explain the relative absence of war in East Asia since 1979, after a period of three decades when East Asia was the world's most war-prone region. Many have discussed the European Peace, only few the East Asian one, which calls for both similar and quite different explanations. The article does not present findings from research already made, but rather calls for a research agenda, aiming to solicit sponsors and contributors around the world who would like to take part in its development. The purpose will not just be to understand the past, but also to discuss what it may take to protect, deepen, and sustain peace in East Asia at a time of economic upheaval and a likely continued, perhaps accelerated shift of economic as well as military power from North America and Europe to East Asia.

Key words: peace and security – East Asia, International Relations theory, conflict resolution

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Introduction

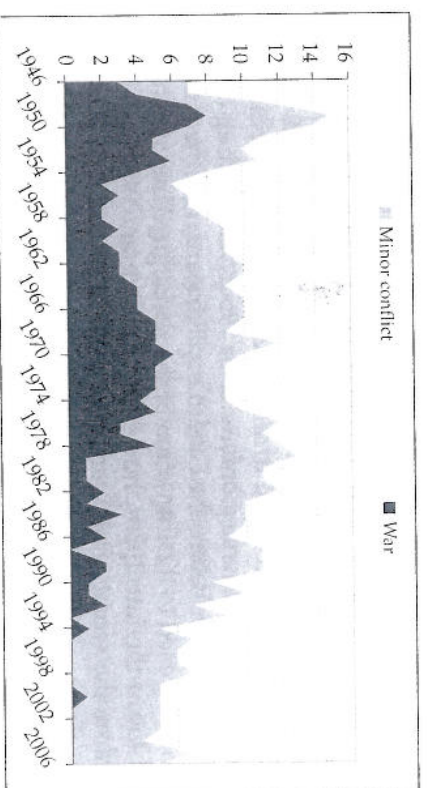
Since 1979, East Asia has been surprisingly peaceful. While there was an annual average of ten regional armed conflicts from 1946 to 1979, it was down to an annual average of eight in the period 1980 to 2005.¹ The change was more radical, however, if only conflicts are counted that had more than 1,000 battle deaths during a calendar year (the PRIO Uppsala dataset's threshold for qualifying an armed conflict as a "war").² From 1946 to 1979, there was an average of four wars in East Asia every year. In 1980-2005, the average was down to 0.5. The worst year after World War II was 1949, with fifteen armed conflicts, eight of which were "wars."

The most peaceful year since World War II was 2004, with four minor conflicts, none of which exceeded the 1,000 threshold (Figure 1). The trend is even clearer in looking at the number of soldiers and civilians killed directly in acts of war (battle deaths). While the total number of battle deaths in East Asia during the thirty years from 1950 to 1979 is estimated at 4.2 million, the number of battle deaths in the 26 years from 1980 to 2005 is calculated at just a little over 100,000 (Figure 2).

The difference between the 1945-1979 period and the period since 1979 is most dramatic in viewing the battle death figures compiled and assessed by Bethany Lacina on the basis of the work of Micheal Clodfelter and multiple other sources.³ They

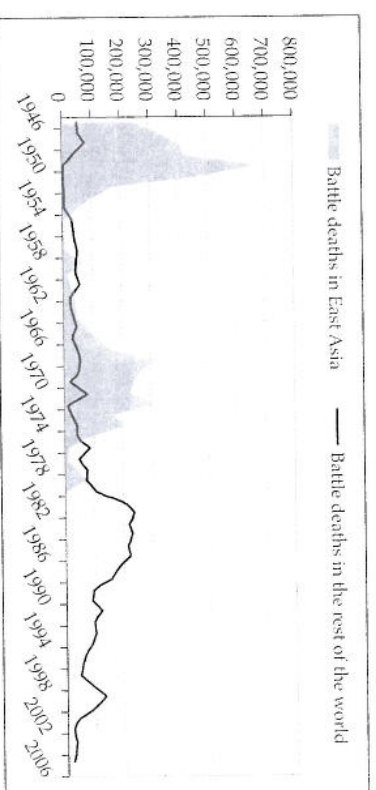
1. An "armed conflict" is defined in the PRIO-Uppsala dataset as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government or territory or both where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year. Of these two parties, at least one has to be the government of a state."
2. "Battle deaths" refer to those military and civilian deaths caused by warring parties that can be directly related to combat over a contested incompatibility. This includes traditional battlefield fighting, guerrilla activities, and all kinds of bombardments including bombings and assassinations in urban warfare. "Battle deaths" is not the same as "war-related deaths," which includes also indirect deaths caused by disease or starvation. See www.pcr.uu.se/publications/UCDP_pub/UCDP%20Battle-deaths%20-%20definitions%20%20sources%20%20methods.pdf.
3. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500-2000* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2002); Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global

Figure 1. Armed conflicts in East Asia, 1946-2007



A "minor conflict" has from 25 to 999 battle deaths in one year. A "war" has 1,000 or more. The "wars" (internal conflicts estimated to have led to 1,000 or more battle deaths in a single year) since 1980 have taken place in Burma (Myanmar), the Philippines, Cambodia, and Indonesia (Aceh). Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v4-2008, at www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/UCDP-PRIO/.

Figure 2. Battle deaths in East Asia and the world, 1946-2006



The Battle Deaths Dataset defines "battle deaths" as deaths resulting directly from violence inflicted through the use of armed force by a party to an armed conflict during "contested combat." "Contested combat" is use of armed force by a party to an armed conflict against any person or target during which the perpetrator faces the immediate threat of lethal force being used by another party to the conflict against him/her and/or allied fighters. Source: The Battle Deaths Dataset version 2.0, at www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths-The-Battle-Deaths-Dataset-version-20/.

show how the first period after World War II was characterized by very high numbers of casualties (although much lower than during World War II) in the Chinese civil war, the first Indochina War, and the Korean War, with the Korean War leading to a peak in 1950 in the number of people killed. This was followed with a few years of little warfare in the mid-1950s: Stalin died and the Korean War ended in an armistice agreement; Indochina was divided by the Geneva Conference of 1954; Mao Zedong consolidated his power before the Great Leap Forward; and the Bandung Conference led to the formation of the nonaligned movement.

From the late 1950s, however, the Vietnam War began and became the worst of all wars after 1945 in terms of the cumulative number of battle deaths—more than two million. The last East Asian wars to take lives in the tens of thousands within one single year were the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 and the ensuing Chinese invasion of northern Vietnam from February to March 1979. Since the late 1970s, the level of warfare in East Asia has remained at a low level similar to that of 1955–1957.

While the decrease in battle deaths in East Asia follows a global decline, other regions have had significantly higher numbers of battle deaths since 1979. Hence, there has also been a shift in the global geography of warfare from East Asia to other parts of Asia and Africa, and also, during the 1990s, to southeastern Europe. Relatively few attempts have been made so far to explain the dramatic decline in warfare in East Asia, a phenomenon we may tentatively call “the East Asian Peace.”⁴

What Is There to Explain?

If we say that “East Asia” consists of Northeast Asia (Japan, North and South Korea, Mongolia, and the People’s Republic of

China with Hong Kong and Macau) and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma [Myanmar], Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, and East Timor), it is a region comprising seventeen internationally recognized states plus the Republic of China on Taiwan, which is recognized only by a few countries. *Figure 1* shows the wars and armed conflicts among and within these seventeen states in the period 1946–2007. The decline in the number of “wars”—costing more than 1,000 battle deaths in a year—exceeds the decline in the number of minor conflicts, those costing 999 battle deaths in a year.

The term “East Asian Peace” is a catchphrase that could be misleading. It cannot be assumed that East Asian societies have become more just or more skillful at peaceful conflict resolution, or more peaceful in a deeper sense. Initially, the effort is to explain the reduced number and low intensity of armed conflict in the thirty years that have elapsed since 1979 as compared with the period 1946–1979. This reduction should both be seen as important unto itself and as a possible indicator of increased peacefulness, however defined.

What was it that changed? If the dependent variable is peacefulness, then the most readily available indicators are the number of armed conflicts and the number of battle deaths. The effort is to explain why these numbers were so low in East Asia from 1980 to 2005 as compared with 1945 to 1979, while also taking other indicators into account, as part of a discussion of how to define peacefulness in a deeper sense.

The worst wars in East Asia (and the world) in the pre-1980 period were the Chinese civil war, 1945–1949; the First Indochina War, 1945–1954; the Korean War, 1950–1953; and the Vietnam War, 1959–1975. However, there were also devastating wars in Indonesia (1945–1949) and Malaya (1948–1957), and intense periods of warfare in Burma and the Philippines. There was a short period of Konfrontasi (confrontation) between Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1960s. There was also a brief but extremely murderous war between China and Vietnam in February–March, 1979. *Figure 2* shows the dramatic impact of these major wars in terms of battle deaths and also how East Asia dominated global warfare until the mid-1970s, at which point other parts of the world (South Asia, West Asia, and Africa) took over.

The number of battle deaths in armed conflicts is, admittedly,

Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths,” *European Journal of Population*, vol. 21, No. 2 (2005), pp. 145–66.

4. Timo Kivimäki, “The Long Peace of ASEAN,” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 38, No. 1 (2001), pp. 5–25; Robert Ross, “The U.S.-China Peace: Great Power Politics, Spheres of Influence, and the Peace of East Asia,” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, No. 3 (2003), pp. 351–75; Benjamin E. Goldsmith, “A Liberal Peace in Asia?” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 44, No. 1 (2007), pp. 5–27.

a crude measure. It includes both military and civilian casualties, but does not include all types of armed violence and does not count indirect deaths. A low number of battle deaths can only be seen as a partial indicator of peacefulness, even narrowly defined. If we use only armed conflict and battle death statistics, the stalemate on the Korean peninsula since 1953 will, for instance, have to be defined as a "Korean Peace." Hence, any serious research program on the East Asian Peace must go beyond these crude figures and seek to establish to what extent the battle death trends converge with trends in other kinds of violence: armed fighting between non-government groups; indirect deaths from hunger or illness caused by war or government policies; criminal violence; one-sided violence (massacres) perpetrated by a government or an armed group against unarmed opponents; and routine violence perpetrated by repressive regimes.

What we can say immediately is that East Asia has had a major share of the world's incidents of one-sided violence, but that the worst of these incidents all belong to the period when there was also much warfare: Tibet, 1959; Indonesia, 1965; Cambodia, 1975-1978. East Asia has also had cases of very high numbers of deaths caused more indirectly by government policies: notably, China's Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960 and the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1975.

The majority of the most massive violence happened in conjunction with the formation of a new East Asian state system to replace the system from before World War II that had been dominated by Europe, the United States, and Japan. One possible explanation for the turn toward less warfare in East Asia after 1979 may be that the formative period of state-building had been completed and, therefore, the states generally recognized each others' borders. However, this is not quite true. The Korean and Taiwanese questions were not resolved. Many border issues remained, and new maritime border issues emerged. Also, there was the unresolved dispute over Vietnam's dominance in Cambodia and Laos. The authority of the existing states also remained contested in parts of Burma, Mindanao, Aceh, West Papua, and East Timor. An important task within a research program on the East Asian Peace would be to establish statistics not just for armed conflict, but also for disputes that have not led to armed conflict. By combining dispute and conflict statistics it may be

possible to find out to what extent the East Asian Peace is due to conflict resolution and to what extent it results from the mere shelving of disputes, or from stalemates like the one between North and South Korea.

What we need to explain then is, first, how the wars in the pre-1979 period ended, and second, why states and armed groups in East Asia did not engage in new similarly devastating wars later on. In order to approach these questions, we may need to pinpoint the exact time when each country made its transition from war to relative peace and conduct a case study of each transition.

So far we have made no distinction between international and internal warfare (civil wars), a standard distinction in most statistics. One reason for mixing them here is that many armed conflicts in East Asia through various kinds of intervention have included elements of both international and civil war. Many, if not most, of East Asia's internal wars took on an international dimension, and vice versa. The Korean War and the three Indochina wars were all civil and international at the same time. Rebel groups were allied ideologically and operationally across borders, and were assisted by external powers. Moreover, the wars of liberation from colonial rule cannot be categorized as either internal or international since what they were about was the formation of the sovereign states that define the distinction internal/external in the international system. That distinction can only be fully applied when a state system has taken a definitive form, with generally recognized borders.

Yet in order to make a sophisticated analysis of the East Asian Peace, we must distinguish between the internal and international aspects of warfare. A key question is whether or not the explanation for the downward trend in international warfare is the same as the explanation for the decline in internal warfare. The processes leading states to wage war against each other are often quite different from those leading to an insurgency or a breakup of a state into factions fighting each other. A possible research strategy would consist in first trying to separate the internal from the international aspects of the wars, and then test different explanatory frameworks.

Explanatory Approaches

An attempt to explain the East Asian Peace may seek inspiration from several international relations and social science theories. The following is, to a certain extent, based on a comprehensive overview of realist, liberal, constructivist, and postmodern literature on China's rise undertaken by Rex Li. He has also examined the influence of such theoretical approaches on Chinese scholarship, finding that there is "a strong influence" of realist thought, that liberalism has become "rather popular," while constructivism has "fast become a popular theory," although it was unknown to most Chinese scholars until recently.⁵ Interestingly, Chinese constructivist scholars often conduct a critique of how realist thinking can lead to dangerous policy outcomes, and offer constructivism as a more peaceful alternative.

The Realist Approach

Warfare is often related to attempts by states or organized groups to conquer or hold on to territories. Hence, realist theories based on analyses of balance of power are likely to provide a good framework for explaining both the prevalence of war in East Asia during the first three quarters of the 20th century, and for the ensuing East Asian Peace. The realignment of the cold war conflict pattern during détente in the 1970s, with a bipolar system being replaced by a tripolar system, aligning China with Japan, the United States, and all of the (now) ten-member ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), may go a long way toward explaining the rapid drop in intensive warfare with great-power involvement. Meanwhile, the completion of the decolonization process had led to the formation of a system of sovereign states with a growing capacity for controlling their own territories and suppressing insurgent groups. Hence, realist theory may explain both the international and the internal aspects of the East Asian Peace.

Robert Ross provides a realist explanation primarily of the international aspects, arguing that the wars in East Asia during

the cold war led to a power balance between a continental power (China) and a maritime power (United States), each with its sphere of influence.⁶ The realignment of the cold war conflict pattern during détente in the 1970s offers a key element in explaining the onset of the East Asian Peace. China and the United States formed a kind of condominium, organizing East Asia into "two distinct spheres of influence," within which each held sway and ordered relations without the interference of the other.⁷ The relative peace since 1979—or since Vietnam was forced to withdraw its forces from Cambodia in 1989—thus rests on a regional balance between these two temporarily satisfied powers and their allies, and might well be broken if the balance is not upheld. The fact that China and the United States both possess strategic nuclear weapons, and that the United States is not supposed to possess a fully reliable first-strike capability, provides additional ground for both powers to avoid provoking each other unnecessarily. Zhu Feng provides a Chinese realist perspective, predicting that China's rise will continue to be peaceful since China will apply only soft-balancing acts against U.S. unipolar power: "In the present unipolar system, China is a satisfied, cooperative and peaceful country."⁸

As for the decline in internal warfare within East Asian states, realists would explain it by citing an increased capacity of states for administering their populations, providing law and order, and repressing rebellious activities. The Asian wars from 1945 to 1979 were to a great extent related to state formation, defining the territorial scope and institutional setup of new states. Through these wars states became more and more entrenched, and slowly built a capacity for repressing and forestalling armed opposition. It should be possible to establish realist explanations based on comparisons of state capacity over time and among states. Analysis of

6. Robert S. Ross, "The U.S.-China Peace: Great Power Politics, Spheres of Influence, and the Peace of East Asia," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, No. 3 (2003), pp. 351-75.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 370; Liselotte Odgaard, *The Balance of Power in Asia-Pacific Security: US-China Policies on Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2007).

8. Zhu Feng, "China's Rise Will Be Peaceful: How Unipolarity Matters," in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 54.

5. Rex Li, *A Rising China and Security in East Asia: Identity Construction and Security Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 8-21, 218-20.

geopolitical dynamics of this kind will form an important context for any explanation of the East Asian Peace, but their explanatory power remains to be tested. One way of doing this is to conduct case studies of to what extent the most powerful East Asian—and also American—leaders have been influenced by realist thinking when formulating their policies.

The Liberal Peace

A different approach consists in comparing East Asia with the more well-known European Peace, trying to see if the same factors that are generally thought to explain the deepening peace in Europe after World War II may also be valid for East Asia. It is generally assumed that the relative absence of warfare in Europe until 1989 was largely due to deterrence. The risk that a confrontation would lead to nuclear war induced both sides in the East-West conflict to show restraint. Meanwhile, Western Europe went through a process of economic and political integration, instigated by leaders who were partly motivated by an urge to overcome the conflicts that had laid the basis for two world wars. The integration process was accompanied by a process of democratization that spread from northwest to southern Europe in the 1970s, and to Eastern Europe after the end of the cold war in 1989. Hence, the European Peace is often considered a “liberal peace,” based on a combination of economic and political integration and liberal, democratic values and political systems.

The theory of a liberal democratic peace is the most strongly established structural explanation for peaceful conditions in the peace studies literature. Throughout recorded history there have rarely, if ever, been armed conflicts between states with a consolidated democratic form of governance. This finding relates primarily to inter-state peace, although many attempts have been made to also apply it to internal peace. Democratic governance is often assumed to have a positive effect on intra-state stability since groups with significant grievances can fight for their interests with non-violent means, and since elected bodies provide a stage for developing mutual respect and recognition between rival political groups. The contribution of democratization to intra-state peace is, however, a complex matter. So far

researchers have not been able to establish any clear correlation between democracy and internal peace. Democratization can actually be a highly destabilizing process.

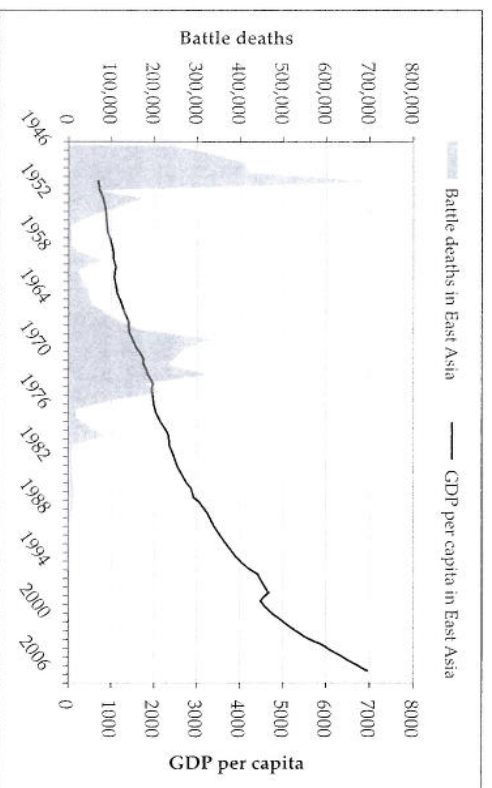
A problem for liberal peace theory is that the East Asian case hardly fits the model of a democratic peace. East Asia has seen neither political integration nor the introduction of democratic political systems on a general basis. East Asia consists of a mixture of consistently authoritarian states (Brunei, Burma, China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam), semi-democratic states with elections always won by the same party (Malaysia, Singapore), states alternating between authoritarian and democratic regimes (Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand), and states that established a durable electoral democracy either before or during the East Asian Peace (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan). Hence, East Asia should not enjoy any democratic “protection” against international warfare. If anything, it ought to be less peaceful, since countries in transition from one political system to another and countries with “hybrid” systems have been found by peace researchers to be more conflict-prone than stable autocracies or democracies.⁹ On the other hand, the relative absence of war in East Asia does not refute or falsify democratic peace theory, since it has never claimed that non-democratic states or states with opposite political systems are bound to fight.

Another finding in peace research is a strong correlation between poverty and conflict: poor countries are more prone to conflict (*Figure 3*). Yet the relationship is not linear. Benjamin Goldsmith finds a strong correlation between levels of economic interdependence and peace in East Asia.¹⁰ A liberal theory on the East Asian Peace cannot be based on the “democratic peace” argument, but must instead argue that economic interdependence makes war less likely for some general reasons, e.g., that the perceived cost of resorting to armed violence increases with interdependence. This would find support in the East Asian experience, as is clearly demonstrated by Goldsmith. As shown in *Figure 3*, the first decade after World War II was characterized by poverty

9. Scott Gates, Havard Hegre, Mark P. Jones, and Havard Strand, “Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800-2000,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 50, No. 4 (2006), pp. 893-908.

10. Goldsmith, “A Liberal Peace in Asia?” pp. 5-27.

Figure 3. Battle deaths, 1946-2007, and GDP per capita in East Asia, 1950-2006

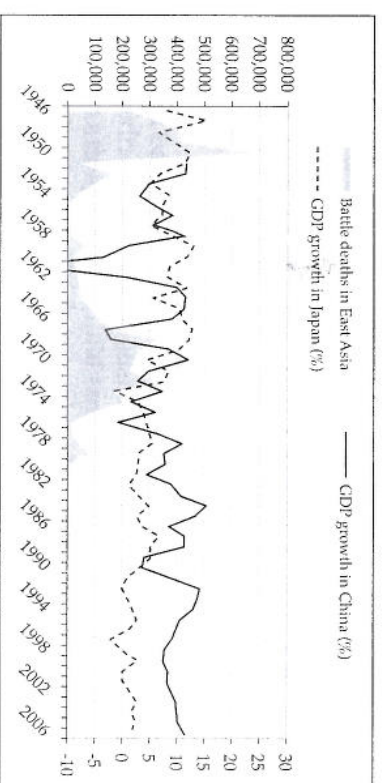


Sources: The Battle Deaths Dataset version 2.0 at www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths/The-Battle-Deaths-Dataset-version-20/; Angus Maddison, *Statistics on World Population, GDP and Per Capita GDP, 1-2006 AD* at www.ggd.net/maddison/.

and warfare and, as Figure 4 shows, also by enormous vacillation in terms of economic growth in China (with similar cases in other regional countries). The next two decades had higher economic growth, to some extent stimulated by the American involvement in Vietnam, which created a strong demand for products from the countries in the region that were allied with the United States. This was, as shown in Figure 4, the period when Japan's economy grew most rapidly while China suffered enormously from the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. But the highest growth came in China during the period of the East Asian Peace.

Figures 3 and 4 also show that the sudden drop in economic growth during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1999, which led to a general, but temporary reduction of GDP per capita, did not have anything to do with, and did not lead to, renewed warfare, although it led to regime change in several East Asian countries. The question now is what effects the present global crisis will have. The explanatory power of the growing economic interde-

Figure 4. Battle deaths and annual GDP growth in China and Japan, 1946-2006



Sources: The Battle Deaths Dataset version 2.0, at www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths/The-Battle-Deaths-Dataset-version-20/; Angus Maddison, *Statistics on World Population, GDP and Per Capita GDP, 1-2006 AD* at www.ggd.net/maddison/ (years 1946-1979) and the International Monetary Fund Data Mapper, at www.imf.org/external/datamapper/index.php (years 1980-2006).

pendence within the East Asian region is also in question. If it explains the East Asian Peace, then growing economic interdependence ought also to have brought peace in other regions and at other times. Much work remains to be done in further exploring the relationship between armed conflict, economic growth, and growing regional and global integration through trade, investments, and other means of communication.

Constructivism

A third kind of explanation, also to some extent inspired by the European example, is cultural or constructivist. The assumption is that there has been a paradigm shift in the region, leading to a drop in the level of armed conflict. Northeast Asia, with the stalemate in Korea and the continued suspicion between Japan and China, does not lend itself easily to a constructivist explanation. Support must be sought mainly in Southeast Asian practices and in the ideology of so-called Asian values, or the ASEAN way, for the formation of a distinctly Southeast Asian culture

characterized by informal consultation and consensus-building. In the process of founding and expanding ASEAN, its leaders agreed to put their differences aside while showing "good-neighbourliness." Amitav Acharya claims that ASEAN contributed to peace by "fostering a climate of socialization and trust," and the Chinese mainland constructivists Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling agreed, confirming that China has gradually adopted much of the ASEAN way through a number of consultative processes and the formation of a China-ASEAN Free Trade Area.¹¹

According to these three writers, ASEAN succeeded in widening the regional scope of its consensus-building to Northeast Asia by establishing consultative forums with outside powers (ASEAN+3, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asian Summit). Acharya, Qin and Wei emphasize the informal character of East Asian peacemaking; the Chinese authors seek to build a theory out of a specifically Asian preference for maintaining consultative processes rather than negotiating formal treaties. Mikael Weissmann, another proponent of a constructivist approach, has proposed that a key to explaining the East Asian Peace is to map out informal political networks.¹²

John Ikenberry's quite different "constructivist" or "liberal institutionalist" theory pays less attention to ASEAN. Instead, he focuses on how East Asia has adopted and taken part in developing international law and global norms of behavior, as a partner in multilateral institutions and under the influence of a benevolent U.S. hegemon.¹³ In Ikenberry's view, the United States has not sought primarily to dominate the world through military power,

but has accommodated multiple countries' interests within a global, liberal system under U.S. leadership. It is interesting to see that Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling point at China's "will to restrain itself" vis-à-vis its regional partners in *informal* processes of building and maintaining relations, whereas John Ikenberry emphasizes the willingness of the United States to "act within institutional [formal] constraints" and tie itself to other states under a global system of rules.¹⁴

Security Complexes

A fourth approach would tap into security complex theory.¹⁵ This theory does not seek to explain the incidence of armed conflict, but rather how regions keep together under shifting economic and other conditions. In their book on regions and power, Buzan and Waever claim that Northeast and Southeast Asia were separate security complexes in the first few decades after World War II, but later merged through economic and other integration into one security complex. This was reflected in the role assumed by ASEAN in fostering frameworks for security talks with Northeast Asian participation. If Buzan and Waever are right, this will have implications for our discussion of the East Asian Peace. It may have developed separately, and for different reasons, in the two regions, or it may have developed in conjunction with the process of integration that merged the two regional complexes into one.

Purpose Transitions

A fifth approach, inspired by theories of learning, may also be interesting to consider.¹⁶ One would then look at how national elites have reformulated their basic outlook and priorities, partly

11. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 47-79; Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling, "Structures, Processes, and the Socialization of Power: East Asian Community-building and the Rise of China," in Ross and Zhu, eds., *China's Ascent*, pp. 115-38.
12. Mikael Weissmann, "Peacebuilding in East Asia: The Role of Track 2 Diplomacy, Informal Networks, and Economic, Social, and Cultural Regionalization," in Jacob Bercovitch, Kwei-Bo Huang, and Chung-Chian Teng, eds., *Conflict Management, Security and Intervention in East Asia: Third-Party Mediation and Intervention Between China and Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 67-82.
13. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China: Power, Institutions and the Western Order," in Ross and Zhu, eds., *China's Ascent*, pp. 89-114.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 114; Qin and Wei, "Structures, Processes," p. 131.
15. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
16. See, among others, Charles F. Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, No. 1 (1990), pp. 3-31; Jeffrey W. Legro, "The Transformation of Political Ideas," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 44, No. 33 (2000), pp. 419-32.

by emulating each other. Jeffrey W. Legro suggests usage of the concept "purpose transitions," which occasionally happen when external events undermine the way the national purpose has been generally conceived, on the condition that alternative purpose formulations are at hand, and are being advocated by groups either within or in opposition to the ruling elite.¹⁷

The East Asian Peace would, in this light, not be considered as having resulted primarily from changes that took place internationally in 1979, or as having been directly caused by any economic or other material change at all. Instead, peace would have come about as a cumulative effect of a series of shifts in priority, or purpose formulation, among the policy-making elites in each of the East Asian states, who learned from each others' success. Four such shifts would stand out as particularly important. First, occupied Japan adopted a "peace constitution," allowing it only to have a self-defense force and restricting its international behavior. Then, in the 1950s, the dominant Japanese policy makers settled for a durable policy of prioritizing economic growth before anything else, adopting a low diplomatic profile, and leaving the protection of Japan's security to the United States (the Yoshida doctrine).¹⁸ In the mid-1960s, inspired by the Japanese example, a power shift in Indonesia led its policy makers to cancel *Konfrontasi* and set the same two priorities as Japan: economic growth and close cooperation with the United States. Then, after Mao's death and the assumption of power by Deng Xiaoping, the People's Republic of China did the same thing. It set economic growth as its first priority, and settled for a foreign policy that emphasized its relations with the United States, with which it aligned itself in a global effort seeking to limit and push back the power of the Soviet Union.

Fourth, and belatedly, in Vietnam, after ruling communist party secretary-general Le Duan's death in 1986, policy makers undertook the same purpose transition, and withdrew troops

from Cambodia. It took until 1995, however, before Vietnam achieved its aim of normalizing relations with the United States. All of these shifts led to increased stability, internally as well as externally (in Indonesia at the cost of massive repression), and allowed economic growth to take place that significantly lifted the general standard of living. Historical case studies may be undertaken of how these priority shifts or purpose transitions took place, and to what extent they were inspired by their predecessors.¹⁹

Testing Theories

Most of these theories offer explanations that fit the East Asian evidence. A research program that aims to explain the East Asian Peace should take all of them into account and explore and examine their explanatory power. The aim should not be limited, however, to building up a multifaceted framework where all or most of the available theoretical approaches are seen as contributing their part of an eclectic explanatory whole. This has already been ably done by Rex Li.²⁰ Some theories will have more explanatory power than others. Hence, it is important to test them not only on the evidence of the East Asian Peace, but also on comparative cases of peace and war. If several theories can account for the East Asian Peace from 1980 to 2009, then one must draw some logical implications of each theory for other periods in East Asian history, as well as for other regions, and see if the theories are then falsified. If, for instance, one theory should imply peace in East Asia in the 1946-1979 period or war between the states in North America, then there is something wrong with it.

A good theory must be able to explain the difference between the periods before and after 1979 (or 1989) in East Asia, and also the difference between East Asia and other regions, such as

17. Jeffrey W. Legro, "Purpose Transitions: China's Rise and the American Response," in Ross and Zhu, eds., *China's Ascent*, pp. 34-54.

18. See Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Contest in the Modern World* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1986); Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

19. See, among others, Charles F. Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, No. 1 (1990), pp. 3-31; Jeffrey W. Legro, "The Transformation of Political Ideas," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 44, No. 33 (2000), pp. 419-32.

20. Rex Li, *A Rising China and Security*.

South Asia and the Middle East.²¹ A good theory should also be able to explain the exceptions to the general rule, such as the continuation of warfare in Cambodia until 1989, in East Timor until 1999, in Aceh until 2005, and the still ongoing or resurgent civil wars in Burma, Mindanao, and South Thailand.

Two Kinds of Empirical Studies

Before testing existing theories it is desirable to establish a relatively detailed overview of all armed conflicts in East Asia during the period 1945-2009, statistically compare the period 1945-1979 with the period 1980-2009, compare East Asian trends with trends in other world regions as well as with the global pattern, distill some main findings, and then either relate them to the existing theories referred to above or form new ones.

There are two main ways of undertaking such empirical studies, both of which are valuable, and which should be pursued in parallel so they can stimulate each other. One is statistical while the other is the historical case study. "Historical case study" does not refer here to a study of representative cases of a large sample but instead to studies of each and every case on an individual basis, thus leading to a synthetic analysis with the aim to establish shared as well as diverging patterns. The statistical analyst will wish to separate the history of armed conflict in East Asia into a number of quantifiable entities, such as "armed conflicts," "conflict years," or "conflict dyads" and then correlate them with other factors such as "trade," "foreign direct investment (FDI)," and "democracy/autocracy," and search for significant correlations. Goldsmith has made a good start at using this method and finds that liberal peace theory fits with the East Asian case if the political side of the theory is left out and only economic integration through trade is retained. He finds a strong correlation between the absence of warfare on the one hand and economic growth and regional trade on the other. In contrast with the statistically-oriented economist or political scientist, the political historian will tend to discriminate at

the outset between the more or less salient armed conflicts in terms of severity and regional ramifications. The historian will examine their start, duration, and ending on a case-by-case basis, focusing mainly on the most important wars and the biggest or most powerful states, and will then seek to explain why there were more armed conflicts and far more severe armed conflicts in 1946-1979 than in 1980-2009. The political historian will, moreover, try to determine certain decisive moments or turning points and see if something happened shortly before that could explain the change or transition to a new state of affairs. The historian would be open to the possibility that a few key choices, made by named individual leaders on the basis of their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions and with more or less clear intentions, could have played a determining role.

When Came the Peace?

In order to explain how East Asia could become so relatively peaceful, it is important to know when the peace started in order to define as precisely as possible the "onset of peace," in the same way that researchers do when explaining an outbreak of war. It shall be argued here that the East Asian Peace cannot be explained through a simple comparison of the periods before and after 1979, but must be studied as the cumulative effect of significant changes in the region and its relationship to the United States well before 1979 as well as afterward.

If we look at the statistical figures above, it would seem that 1979 was the great watershed. It certainly was for China, and not simply because 1979 was the year when the People's Republic normalized its relations with the United States. Mao Zedong always relied on violence, both in theory and in practice. He believed in violent revolution, he engaged China on the side of North Korea in 1950, he provided considerable support to the Viet Minh and later North Vietnam in its armed struggle as well as to other insurgent movements, he worked on the assumption that World War III was inevitable, and he provoked a war with the Soviet Union in 1969. Once Deng Xiaoping consolidated power in his own hands and saw the disastrous effects of the punitive expedition he ordered against Vietnam in early 1979,

21. Eiel Solingen, "Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East," *American Political Science Review*, No. 4 (2007), pp. 757-80.

he settled for a different policy of prioritizing economic growth, seeking to avoid armed conflict, and allying China with the West in its confrontation with the Soviet Union. His successors would continue his economy-first policy and resolve a number of border disputes, while also modernizing China's military forces. China has upheld a policy of repressing democratic dissent, reacting violently to any outburst of protest movements among the Tibetans or Uighurs against Han Chinese domination, and obligating itself by law to attack Taiwan if it declares its independence. Still, it is noticeable that China has not fought a single war for thirty years.²² Therefore, 1979 was certainly the turning point for China on its way from war to relative peace. Because of China's size and importance, the year 1979 is therefore the best candidate for being considered as the turning point for the region as a whole.

However, if we set China aside, we have already seen that the other countries in the region made their transitions at other times. The East Asian Peace after 1979 should therefore be seen as the cumulative effect of changes that had started much earlier. Japan's transition happened as a consequence of its defeat in World War II, which compromised the country's former militarism, not just internationally but also in the view of much of Japan's own population. Japan adopted its "peace constitution" in 1947 with its famous Article 9 where Japan renounced the use of war so it could not later engage in any military activities outside of its own territory and could retain only a Self-Defense Force. In 1951, when signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty with the allied powers in World War II, Japan also signed a bilateral security treaty with the United States in which its only military obligation was to defend its own territory. Once allowed by the U.S. occupation authorities to reinstate its efficient economic institutions from before the war, the Japanese political and business elite could concentrate on perfecting its "capitalism from above" and generate the economic "miracle" that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Since 1945, Japanese troops have not taken part directly in any war, although there has been mounting political pressure for Japan to participate in United Nations

peacekeeping operations or UN-sanctioned coalition warfare. In 2008-2009, both Japan and China sent naval forces to the waters off Somalia to escort ships and protect them against pirates.

In Korea, the first turning point was the armistice agreement in 1953, although it did not formally end the state of war (which is still on). Korea may be difficult to include in an analysis of the East Asian Peace since it remains divided between an impoverished, heavily militarized North and an also heavily militarized but economically successful South. What needs to be explored is how the turn to more peace in the region has influenced the Korean issue and how it can be that North Korea never managed to shift to a capitalist mode of development and to a more pro-Western stance in its foreign policy, thus stagnating while the former comrades in China and Vietnam modernized. It would seem that a turning point had come when both North and South Korea joined the United Nations in 1991 while keeping national unity as their long-term aim. Instead, there was renewed tension and a disastrous famine in the North. Yet another possible turning point was South Korea's switch to the so-called "sunshine policy" in 1999, leading to the first summit of the South Korean and North Korean leaders in June 2000. But, once again, this did not lead to any radical shift in North Korea's policy. North Korea is an aberration that needs to be treated as such in the context of explaining the larger East Asian Peace.

For insular Southeast Asia, Indonesia had a clearly pacifying effect on regional and international relations when General Suharto assumed power in 1965-1967. Internally however, rather the opposite was the case. The change from Sukarno to Suharto happened in reaction to a violent coup and led to a massacre of the Indonesian communists and sympathizers. Suharto's New Order was based on an ideology that emphasized a national struggle against two *internal* enemies: communism and Islamist separatism. Internally, Suharto's regime was extremely violent and repressive, while it sought peace and stability externally. However, since international power relations did not prevent it at the time, Indonesia seized the chance to occupy and annex East Timor after it slipped away from Portuguese colonialism in 1975.

However, Suharto also undertook two other changes in relation to his predecessor's policy. He applied policies geared to stim-

22. If we don't count the fight on the Vietnamese border in 1984 and the incident in the Spratlys in 1988.

ulate export-driven economic growth. He realigned Indonesia's foreign policy with Japan and the United States, and notably reconciled Indonesia with its main neighbors, called off Sukarno's policy of *Konfrontasi* against the newly created Malaysian federation, and joined with Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines to found ASEAN in 1967. In 1971, ASEAN officially declared a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia, leading to the "ASEAN Way." The transition to more internal peace in Indonesia came much later as an after-effect of the democratic transition in 1998. Significant breakthroughs were the withdrawal from East Timor in 1999 and the peace agreement with the Aceh liberation movement GAM in 2005.

And, as mentioned, Vietnam only really joined the East Asian Peace when it withdrew from Cambodia in 1989 and thus allowed the stage to be set for the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia in 1991. This paved the way for Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Myanmar's membership in ASEAN and for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in Vietnam itself. The priority shift in Hanoi during the "Doi Moi" reforms in 1986-1989 may perhaps be the most interesting of all to study from the point of view of theories of learning, since the Vietnamese decision makers could draw lessons from the experiences of Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, and China when formulating their own new policies.

Hence, the onset of the East Asian Peace could be seen to have happened in several stages. Each stage could be studied separately and, in addition, be related to the others in order to explain the peaceful outcome.

How Deep Is the Peace?

In order to explain the East Asian Peace it is also essential to establish its quality, or "depth." The shallowest kind of peace would be a "militarized dispute" based on deterrence, such as between the two Koreas. Internally, a shallow peace would be peace based on heavy repression such as in North Korea (if this can be called "peace" at all). Another kind of shallow peace is one with acute and active conflict, but where only one party (normally the government) has access to arms. This is the case,

for instance, when an unarmed insurgency either leads to regime change or is being repressed without anyone being killed. Peace must also be said to be shallow if it is based primarily on conflict avoidance with the shelving of disputes until some later time when the chances are better for realizing one's aims, although this may be contested by constructivist proponents of emphasizing "process" rather than "content." A deep peace may be found where institutional or norm-based mechanisms are in place, allowing conflicts to be handled or played out non-violently within an institutional framework that is generally recognized as legitimate by all the parties involved. This may be the case both on the domestic level and in bilateral as well as regional relations among states. It is also possible to imagine an even deeper, consensual peace based on complete harmony where mutual trust is so high that there is no conflict at all, or where all members of society respect their leaders so much that they fully accept their decisions. Realistically, such peace is only possible, if at all, within very small social units. If peace is defined as complete harmony on the national or international level, then "peace" may easily be turned on its head and serve as a rationale for repressive policies.

It is not easy to adequately measure the depth or quality of peacefulness, but without an attempt to do so, research seeking to explain a certain state of peace may itself become shallow.

Conclusion

This article has presented a case for undertaking substantial research into the relative peace in East Asia since 1979, with a view to explaining it and establishing under what circumstances it may be sustainable in the period ahead. The dependent variable in this research, which must include both international and internal armed conflicts, is "peacefulness." The most immediate or easiest quantifiable indicators of peacefulness are the number of armed conflicts and the number of people killed in armed conflict as well as in one-sided violence conducted by states and armed groups (massacres, repression). Researchers should seek to refine and increase the availability of data on these measures as well as seek to establish other measurable indicators, for

instance of unresolved, militarized disputes. A key task in the explanatory endeavor will be to establish when the East Asian Peace began, if it "broke out" at a given point in time such as after the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979 or after the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, or if it was established incrementally as a result of change within different countries at different points of time.

Another key task is to establish the "depth" or "quality" of the East Asian Peace. To what extent is it due to deterrence and repression? To what extent has it become embedded in institutional mechanisms of conflict management or resolution? To what extent is it based on trust or a shared dedication to war avoidance?

The research should be comprehensive and include all the most relevant theoretical approaches in the social sciences, but the aim should not just be to establish an eclectic explanatory framework by compiling elements of all existing theories. Instead, we should critically examine and test each theory, thus arriving at conclusions as to which has the strongest explanatory power. Among the independent variables that need to be taken into account are power, military capability, alliance patterns, economic integration, national and international institutions, informal political networks, norms, discourses, and intentions.

When examining the respective role of these variables, a key challenge is not just to correlate them with indicators of armed conflict, but to determine to what extent each variable underwent significant change prior to the onset of peace. Another challenge is to establish if the same variables can explain internal and international peace or if we need different kinds of explanatory frameworks for internal civil peace and peace among states.

It will be important to relate the research to ongoing political debates on what it may take to keep the peace in a situation of global economic crisis and a shift of global power from West to East.

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