



Enduring Rivalries in the Asia-Pacific

STEVE CHAN

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Enduring Rivalries in the Asia-Pacific

Enduring rivalries recurrently ensnare states in militarized disputes and wars. Are they poised to intensify in the Asia-Pacific, a region characterized by regime and cultural differences, territorial contests, and competing nationalist and regime claims? It is often argued that these conditions and recent power shifts are likely to lead to conflict escalation and contagion, especially in Sino-American relations. Steve Chan's book challenges this common view and argues instead that Asia-Pacific rivalries are likely to be held in abeyance. He suggests that the majority of leaders in the region wish to base their political legitimacy on their economic performance rather than on popular mobilization against foreign enemies. Economic interdependence and political multilateralism have restrained and in some cases reversed rivalries. Although Asia-Pacific states will continue to quarrel, Chan argues that their relations are more stable today than at any other time since 1945.

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Preface

This book is about interstate rivalries in the Asia-Pacific, especially East Asia. Interstate rivals are defined as adversaries engaging in a competition. They are parties to long-running feuds described by the international relations literature as “enduring rivalries” (Diehl 1998; Diehl and Goertz 2000). Examples such as Greece and Turkey, Israel and Syria, and Pakistan and India come to mind. These relations attract the attention of scholars because they account for a disproportionately large number of interstate conflicts: although representing just about 1 percent of all the dyads that had existed in the interstate system during 1816–1992, they were responsible for 40 percent of the militarized disputes and almost half of the wars that occurred during this period (Stinnett and Diehl 2001). These rivals also have a history of recurrent crises that seem to become more frequent over time (Colaresi and Thompson 2002). Thus, enduring rivals are especially disputatious, and they are especially dangerous to international peace and stability.

Given their propensity for conflict, it is only natural that interstate rivalries have become an important subject for those who study Asia-Pacific relations. Aaron Friedberg (1993/94) wrote shortly after the Cold War’s end that Asia was “ripe for rivalry” in a new multipolar world. More recently, Jonathan Holslag (2010: 1, 169) remarked that “China and India will not grow without conflict with each another [sic],” and that their “enduring rivalry for regional power means that instability is [only] temporarily suppressed.” Commenting on Sino-Indian relations, Shalendra Sharma (2009: 183) was also pessimistic: “[their] growing ambitions, competing interests, and long history of distrust and suspicion cannot be easily overcome, not even through vigorously growing economic and diplomatic linkages.” Others have called attention to intensified rivalry on the Korean Peninsula in light of Pyongyang’s nuclear program and its bellicosity, for example in sinking Seoul’s naval vessel *Cheonan* in March 2010. In the summer of 2012, there was renewed tension between China and the Philippines and between China and Japan over their competing sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas, respectively.

Although relations across the Taiwan Strait have become more stable since the election of Ma Ying-jeou as Taiwan's president, the risk of a military confrontation still remains. When enduring rivalries are combined with rapid power shifts and polarized interstate alignment, this mixture can create a combustible brew that produces cataclysmic conflicts involving many countries, such as in World War I (Thompson 2003). The potential for Washington to become involved in a conflict starting on the Korean Peninsula or across the Taiwan Strait motivates much of the US discourse on Asian rivalries.

I disagree with the generally pessimistic conclusion of much of this discourse, suggesting that Asia-Pacific countries are poised to renew or intensify their rivalries. This region is yet to become a security community like the North Atlantic, of course (Deutsch *et al.* 1957), but compared to the 1950s and 1960s there is now a significant relaxation of tension and a large increase in economic interconnections. The alignment patterns prevailing during the Cold War have broken down, resulting in most Asia-Pacific states multilateralizing their external ties. Moreover, defense spending as a share of national economy has stayed stable or trended down for most countries in the region. For many (though clearly not all) of the contentious dyads, militarized disputes have declined in recent years. China, which has often been identified as a party to several rivalries in the region (e.g. with Russia, Japan, India, Vietnam, Taiwan, and the United States), has settled most of its border disputes (Fravel 2008), although its territorial settlement with India and in the South and East China Seas is still pending. Pointing to different economic, military and other indicators, I will argue that the general trend is toward an abatement rather than an exacerbation of rivalries in the region. This argument, however, does not deny the existence of remaining sources of distrust and even antipathy, which might kindle a renewal or intensification of the competitive dynamic. Mutual recriminations and public displays of anger can recur, especially when domestic partisanship and nationalist sentiments become involved in highly publicized disputes. I contend, however, that Asian elites' general pivot to pursue economic openness and interdependence and their increasingly multilateralized relations contribute to containing the danger of conflict escalation.

Robert Jervis (1968) once remarked that officials are more likely to exaggerate the threat from other countries than to make the opposite mistake of underestimating it. Scholars are likely to commit the same error: they tend to give too much emphasis to the security dilemma that perpetuates the competitive logic underlying rivalries, and not enough to interests, ideas and institutions that incline leaders to override a narrow conception of relative gains and encourage them to break out of the

dynamic of a rivalry. Thus, analysts are constantly surprised by momentous developments such as when Mikhail Gorbachev decided to accept retrenchment and end the Cold War, when Anwar Sadat visited Israel, and when Richard Nixon went to China. I question especially the view that cultural similarity, ideological affinity and regime character are either necessary or sufficient conditions for the genesis or conclusion of rivalries. These being relatively static conditions, they cannot in themselves explain why rivalries emerged in the first place, went into remission in some cases, and were terminated in others (as in Anglo-American, American–Japanese, and Sino-Russian relations). For instance, cultural similarity has not prevented contentious relations on the Korean Peninsula and in the Middle East in recent decades, or the historical rivalry between Prussia and Austria. The Sino-Soviet dispute also shows that a similar ideology and regime type do not stop rivalry from developing. Moreover, authoritarian regimes and regimes with different ideological outlooks have been known to tame their rivalries, in order to form the United Arab Emirates and the Concert of Europe, for example (Kupchan 2010). When citing factors such as those just mentioned as causes for rivalries, scholars often risk the error of idiosyncrasy or irrelevance (when the same alleged cause produces different historical outcomes, or when the same outcome has occurred both with and without the supposed cause).

I also question the tendency by many scholars to lump different kinds of contentious relations under the common label of “rivalry,” and to treat these relations primarily as bilateral matters. Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson (2007) have distinguished “spatial rivalries” between neighbors that compete against each other mainly for territorial control or regime legitimacy, and “strategic rivalries” in which the participating states mainly compete for international influence and status. Spatial rivalries are often derivative of strategic rivalries in that the great powers’ competition tends to motivate them to support opposing sides in local contests, thereby sustaining many such contests that would have otherwise ended without third-party involvement. One cannot understand Asian rivalries without grasping the history of foreign influences, whether direct or indirect – especially the role played by the United States. To a greater or lesser extent, local spatial rivalries in Asia are influenced by the strategic rivalry that engaged Moscow and Washington during the Cold War, and more recently the strategic relationship between Beijing and Washington. That these rivalries are nested or interconnected is one reason for their tendency to become protracted and difficult to resolve. Many enduring rivalries involve asymmetric contestants – that is, they consist of competing sides with very lopsided capabilities. One of my

main arguments is that the weaker side in these contests would not have dared to accept, not to mention instigate, repeated confrontations with its stronger opponent had it not expected support from a more powerful third party. Third-party intervention, actual or expected, is therefore a cause for enduring rivalries of the spatial type. Anticipated support from a powerful ally encourages the weaker side to hold out and even to precipitate a crisis in the hope of mobilizing this ally's support for its cause. This motivation sometimes engenders the fear of entrapment by an ally (Snyder 1997). When outside support is withdrawn in an asymmetric rivalry, the weaker side often seeks rapprochement with its counterpart, such as in the case of German reunification. Wars have expanded in the past primarily due to the intervention by a major state in a conflict originating from a dispute between its ally (typically a minor state) and another country (Vasquez 2009). Major states' involvement in local conflicts has influenced the life histories of large multilateral conflicts (Miller 2007).

When scholars privilege ecological variables (such as cultural homogeneity, regime similarity, and ideological affinity) in their explanation, they tend to give short shrift to the role of policy calculation by the rivals – and by their respective foreign sponsors or allies. We saw recently policy reversals across the Taiwan Strait and in inter-Korean relations – albeit in different directions (Chan, Hu and Sohn 2013) – between the Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou administrations and between the Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak administrations, respectively. One reason for these reversals was the different policies pursued by the US George W. Bush administration in restraining Taiwan's pro-independence forces (after the US president's initial public statement to "do whatever it takes" to defend Taiwan) and in getting tough with North Korea (in naming it as a member of the "axis of evil," thus arousing Pyongyang's suspicion that Washington was bent on bringing about its "hard crash"). In both cases, Beijing and Pyongyang responded more to Washington's posture than to that of their immediate neighbor, Taipei and Seoul respectively (Kim 2011; Scobell 2011). One can cite other examples of the important role played by third parties in perpetuating, exacerbating, or dampening and even terminating enduring rivalries. Mikhail Gorbachev's withdrawal of Soviet support was a critical factor in New Delhi's and Hanoi's decisions to accept *détente* with China. It also led to Hanoi's withdrawal of troops from Cambodia, thus satisfying one of the conditions for Sino-Soviet reconciliation.

Although the spirit of Camelot has yet to pervade Asia, the ghost of Hobbes has been banished to a remarkable extent since the Cold War. We are likely to see the trend of rivalry abatement continue. This proposition

goes against the grain of realists' expectations. Realists tend to emphasize the primacy of military power and the persistence of structural anarchy and self-help in interstate relations. They question the importance or relevance of economic interdependence, domestic politics, and non-state actors. They often exaggerate the extent of interstate conflict and conversely, underestimate the potential for interstate cooperation. East Asia has experienced a transformative change such that it is more stable and peaceful now than at any other time during the past century or so. This statement does not deny that acrimonies and distrust continue to exist, as has been shown recently in various sovereignty disputes in the East and South China Seas. Such disputes, however, are far less likely to escalate to larger military confrontations today than they were three or four decades ago. Although occasional territorial disputes can be expected to recur (I use the analogy of "streetcars" in later discussion) and nationalist sentiments can add fuel to public anger and mutual recrimination, ongoing trends are likely to restrain the prospect of a reversion to the rigid, exclusive alignment patterns characteristic of the Cold War. In advancing this proposition, I will point to the following reasons.

First, East Asian states have generally shifted to a policy agenda emphasizing economic development and interdependence. In contrast to the contemporary Middle East and their own past, East Asian elites have abandoned an inward-looking approach to national development and/or a model of garrison state (Lasswell 1941) that prioritizes foreign confrontation as a means to elite control (Solingen 2007). They have instead increasingly pivoted toward economic performance based on opening to the outside world as a source for their legitimacy and popularity. This is a huge transformation because one of the principal sources for sustaining rivalry has now been significantly dampened, if not entirely removed from the domestic politics of East Asian countries. Diversionary tactics to blame foreign scapegoats for one's own domestic failures and the dynamics of partisan outbidding in order to demonstrate one's "toughness" in facing down external adversaries no longer provide the powerful domestic fuel to motivate foreign contests that they once did. Naturally, nationalist demonstrations and political posturing can still occur, such as in Sino-Japanese interactions during September 2012. I see such occurrences more as aberrations of a more basic trend toward fostering regional economic interdependence and political accommodation, however. A national priority stressing economic development based on access to foreign markets and capital requires a stable international environment, and the success of this prioritization thus far has gained itself an increasingly large number of domestic proponents and stakeholders that are likely to further entrench and enhance this internationalist

orientation, favoring stability. North Korea is the exception rather than the rule, while Myanmar is the latest example of a long succession of Asian states that have turned away from isolation. The adoption of the “trading state” model (Rosecrance 1986) has both caused and resulted from a realignment of domestic interests and influence in favor of prioritizing economic performance and interdependence to the benefit of regional stability and abatement of rivalry. Increasing commerce across the Taiwan Strait (Kastner 2009) is but the most dramatic example of this ongoing trend. In contrast to the “trading state” model, the “strategic state” model prioritizes the pursuit of national security and power – defined primarily in terms of “hard power” and exemplified by territorial expansion, military alliances and armament procurement, which are the typical practices emphasized by traditional realists.

Second, when many countries in a region pursue a similar strategy of emphasizing economic performance and interdependence, they create a synergistic effect that restrains interstate tension and rivalry. Cross-border production chains and multinational investments have the consequence of engaging third parties, which acquire a vested stake in interstate stability. When tension rises across the Taiwan Strait, US interests are engaged. Similarly, Chinese interests become engaged when Pyongyang roils the Korean Peninsula. Naturally, Beijing and Washington have always had important strategic interests in these areas. What is being underscored here is that with increasing economic interdependence there is now an additional commercial dimension to these interests and that there are now powerful economic stakeholders in each of the relevant countries with a vested interest in stabilizing interstate relations. It is, moreover, important to stress that whereas external ties were highly polarized during the Cold War (with dichotomization between the communist and non-communist states), this alignment pattern has broken down recently. Asian states have generally multilateralized their relations, departing from the structure of bipolarized regional relations prevalent during the earlier era. This multilateralization of ties – when states reach out beyond the traditional political or ideological divisions, as most clearly demonstrated by the developing relationship between Seoul and Beijing – is important because bipolarization was one of the key ingredients in the confluence of factors that produced World War I (Thompson 2003). The demonstrable success of the export-led model of growth by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan encouraged emulation by subsequent generations (including China and Vietnam). Success therefore breeds more success, fostering a contagion process that has the security dilemma operating in reverse. The holdouts are under increasing pressure to revise their policy lest they suffer further decline in their international

status – a realist reason that contributed to Mikhail Gorbachev's and Deng Xiao-ping's motivation to undertake policy reform.

Third, as already mentioned, strategic rivalries among the leading powers have often abetted local spatial rivalries. Soviet–American competition for influence played into the rivalry dynamics in East and South Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East during the Cold War. The weaker side in the local contests often counted on outside intervention to boost their cause in confrontations which they had sometimes deliberately provoked or instigated, such as in Greece's involvement in the Cyprus crises, Somalia's incursions into the Ogden territories controlled by Ethiopia, and the wars fought by Pakistan and Egypt against India and Israel, respectively (Leng 2000). In the near future, Sino-American relations will be an increasingly pivotal factor affecting various historically acrimonious relations in Asia. These relations pertain not only to the obvious ones across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula, but also those involving relations among China, Japan, Russia, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Although China's recent rise has led many to look to power transition theory (Organski and Kugler 1980), with its ominous implication of a possible Sino-American clash, much more is involved in this theory than is sometimes argued in its simplistic interpretations. Analysts tend to focus only on states' changing capabilities, without questioning their changing incentives. I argue that although China's capabilities to change the rules of the road have increased, it has also acquired a greater stake in these rules which have contributed to its rise. That is, its incentives to undermine the international system should have declined – it should have instead acquired a greater interest in preserving regional stability that is imperative for sustaining its economic priority. Conversely, the United States faces mounting resource constraints on its various domestic and foreign objectives. Although the United States still enjoys preponderant military power, China has become more important economically for its neighbors. It has displaced the United States as the most important export market and investment destination for Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, among others. This bifurcation of military and economic influence should work against bipolarization of regional relations, enabling the other countries to hedge or equilibrate between Washington and Beijing. Under these circumstances, Beijing and Washington would also be wary of the moral hazard that their support for their allies might be exploited by them. We have already seen some evidence showing China and the United States distancing themselves from North Korea and Taiwan, respectively, lest the latter be emboldened to instigate crises in order to commit their sponsors in an unwanted confrontation with South Korea and China, respectively. Thus, the danger of

“chain ganging” (Christensen and Snyder 1990) – whereby the leading states are dragged into conflicts because of their alliance ties with secondary powers (as shown by the chain of events set off by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914) – has receded considerably in the Asia-Pacific in recent years. Naturally, and unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is a multilateral alliance, the traditional hub-and-spokes pattern of US bilateral alliances in East and South Asia presents another firewall against conflict contagion transmitted by these ties. The absence of formal alliance ties among US partners in East Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Cha 1999), also serves as a barrier to conflict contagion.

My approach to this book seeks to integrate substantive knowledge about the region and international relations theorizing. These two areas of scholarship should be mutually informative, but this has often not been the case. Area specialists tend to dwell on ideographic narratives, and international relations analysts have been often attracted to abstract theorizing or statistical analyses divorced from historical contexts. Both suffer unnecessarily as a result, and miss the opportunity for cross-fertilization. This book is not about detailed analysis of particular countries or rivalries, nor does it offer a compilation of statistical evidence. It seeks instead to strike a balance in the hope of reaching a wider audience without losing sight of the need to combine substance, theory and policy relevance.

Although I refer occasionally to “Asia,” my discussion focuses primarily on East Asia. I do not attend to the historical animosities in the Middle East or Central Asia, and give only limited attention to South Asia. Sometimes I refer to “the Asia-Pacific” in order to communicate the involvement of countries located in Oceania and North America, especially the United States.

I thank the University of Colorado for granting me a sabbatical, which contributed to my completing the book. This book and my last one (Chan 2012) also benefited from a fellowship from South Korea’s East Asia Institute and an award from Japan’s Sasakawa Peace Foundation, administered through the East-West Center in Washington, DC. In spring and summer 2011, I taught as a visiting faculty at the University of Hong Kong and the Tamkang University (Taiwan) respectively. I am grateful for the interactions I had with colleagues at these institutions and at others where I had given talks on this book’s general topic, including Academia Sinica, Macquarie University, National Taiwan University, National Chengchi University, Seoul National University, University of Sidney, and Yonsei University.

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1 What about enduring rivalries?

At the height of the Cold War, Edgar Snow, a former correspondent in war-torn China, published *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today* (1962). The title of his book invites empathy and understanding for one's foreign counterpart, invoking the Latin root for the word *rivalry*, which refers to inhabitants on opposite banks of a river. Snow was accused of pro-communist sympathies during the McCarthy era and left his native United States to live in Switzerland, where he died in 1972. Some of his remains were returned to China and buried on the grounds of Beijing University, where a plaque stands to commemorate him as "an American friend of the Chinese people."

In recent years, especially in the wake of China's rapid growth, some US intellectual and policy circles have suggested that Asia is poised to enter a more tumultuous era, to be occasioned by a revival and intensification of interstate rivalries (e.g. Betts 1993/94; Friedberg 1993/94). This book disagrees with this proposition. It argues instead that the region's general trend has been moving in the direction of rivalry abatement. Moreover, it sees the predominant inclination to treat rivalries as primarily bilateral contests – a penchant shared by many quantitative and qualitative scholars of international relations – to be analytically unhelpful, as it obscures rather than clarifies the dynamics that sustain many rivalries. Local rivalries are often embedded, or nested, in the strategic competition between leading powers, changing these rivalries into multilateral affairs. Relations between the leading powers can decisively influence the perpetuation or termination of local rivalries. In at least this sense, foreign variables tend to trump domestic variables in the life cycles of many contentious dyads commonly described as *enduring rivalries* in the relevant literature (e.g. Diehl 1998; Diehl and Goertz 2000). Naturally, the evolution of rivalries also reflects states' changing domestic conditions and leadership thinking. With respect to East and South Asia, I emphasize the far-reaching consequences of the move by many of their governing elites to economic development as the overriding policy priority; a concern that in turn requires stable external relations, promotes

economic interdependence, and keeps the dynamics of rivalry in check and sometimes even puts them in reverse. These elites' internationalist economic orientation – in line with the “trading state” model described by Richard Rosecrance (1986) – also encourages multilateral ties or what has been described sometimes as “omnidirectional diplomacy.” The consequent de-alignment of traditional alliance relationships prevalent during the Cold War tends to again dampen rivalries and contain the danger of contagious conflict. Finally, although Sino-American relations are not without an important element of competition and tension, these ties are quite different from the nature of Soviet–American relations during the Cold War, which provided much of the fuel for sustaining, even abetting, local rivalries. In advancing these arguments, I will address several seeming puzzles and oversights in the current discourse.

Rivalry identification and some seeming puzzles

One often hears Sino-American, Sino-Indian, and Sino-Russian relations described as “rivalries” (e.g. Ganguly and Thompson 2011a). It is of course true that Beijing and Washington were outright hostile toward each other in the 1950s and 1960s, and both sides still feel uneasy and suspicious about the other even today. Their armed forces fought in Korea and engaged in repeated confrontations across the Taiwan Strait. But there was also a period from roughly Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 to the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 during which the two countries cooperated strategically to oppose the USSR. They were then, for all practical purposes, informal allies. Similarly, Sino-Soviet (Russian) relations underwent enormous transformations in the post-1945 period. Beijing and Moscow were formal allies until their relationship became acrimonious and then downright hostile in the early 1960s. Prior to this breakup, there was genuine affection and intimate cooperation between these two communist states and their peoples, so that it would not be an exaggeration to describe their relationship as a security community (Deutsch *et al.* 1957) in which war had become unthinkable, and where pervasive narratives showed a sense of common cause and shared destiny (incidentally, security communities are subject to reversal, as shown by the American Civil War). More recently, with the settlement of their border disputes, Beijing and Moscow have had a rapprochement. China has imported most of its weapons from Russia, and the two have collaborated to oppose various US-led initiatives, including blocking United Nations intervention in Syria. One encounters similar changes in Sino-Indian ties, which were quite cordial until their border war in 1962. Since Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in late

1988, their relations have entered into a more relaxed phase, even if they have not quite returned to the same level of official friendliness that was evident in the early 1950s. India was then a strong advocate against the West's diplomatic isolation of China, and served as a conduit of communication between Beijing and Washington prior to and during the Korean War. The famous Five Principles of Co-existence – or *Panchshila* (“five principles” in Hindi) – were first codified in the Sino-Indian treaty of 1954. Beijing and New Delhi have now demilitarized their border, even though they have not yet definitively settled their boundary disputes. They have also initiated other confidence-building measures and entered into increasing economic exchanges. Somehow, the word “rivalry” does not quite capture the major turns and twists of relations for the three pairs of countries just mentioned. As a consequence, it tends to obscure rather than illuminate, implying continuous contention or competition when there have in fact been periods of marked cooperation. Elevated tension and recurrent crises only characterize some periods of these relations.

One can say the same about Sino-Vietnamese and Indo-Pakistani relations, as well as relations on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait. These relations have encountered tense periods, even large-scale wars, but it is not accurate to describe them as rivalries to the extent that this concept refers to unremitting hostility, steady conflict, and/or relentless competition. There have clearly also been periods of relaxation, such as during the presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea, and since the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou in Taiwan. There was also relative calm in Indo-Pakistani relations for more than a decade after their 1971 war, which ended in Bangladesh's independence. Thus, these countries' relations have also gone through major changes: both improvements and deteriorations. If by “enduring rivalry” one means recurrent confrontations with a high risk of escalation to war, relations among at least some of these dyads have improved to such a point that this description does not fit. It seems odd therefore that some analysts have shown an acute concern for rivalry revival or intensification in Asia, when the available evidence points rather decisively to a substantial decline in the incidence of militarized disputes in, say, the last ten years compared to the previous decade for most (thus, not all) of the contentious dyads just mentioned, as well as for some others (e.g. between Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand and Cambodia, and Thailand and Myanmar). This generalization does not deny that highly politicized acrimonies can surface occasionally, as they have between China and Japan and between Japan and South Korea over their competing sovereignty claims to the Diaoyutai/Senkaku and Dokdo/Takeshima islands, respectively. Official protests and popular outbursts highlighted these much-publicized

controversies in 2012. Remarkably, however, the governments involved have often acted to contain these conflicts, such as by avoiding the use of military vessels in asserting their territorial claims and by restraining their own citizens from undertaking provocative actions.

As soon as one acknowledges that rivalries may go into remission and that some may even end in reconciliation, many of the frequently cited factors no longer appear to be capable of explaining the initiation, maintenance, and termination of rivalries. Factors such as physical or cultural proximity, regime type and ideology, and demographic and military balance are usually analytic constants, or at least change rather slowly. As such, they are poor candidates for explaining the rise and decline of animosity between contending states; they may at best serve as background information that provides the necessary but insufficient conditions for rivalries to develop and take hold. Physical proximity and cultural homogeneity, for example, do not in themselves explain why the European states were once a highly contentious group, or why contemporary Middle Eastern relations continue to be turbulent – even though these same conditions have not had a similar effect on relations among the Latin American countries. That is, factors such as those just cited cannot in themselves explain both variations over time (as in contemporary European relations compared to their past) and variations across regions (as in the differences in the rivalry propensities of Middle Eastern versus Latin American countries, both of which have relatively homogenous cultures compared to those in East Asia).

There is sometimes a seeming sense of *après moi, le déluge* in the writings of some US observers, a sense that with a reduced US profile in the region, East Asia is poised to enter a more dangerous period. Whether implicitly or explicitly, this reduced US profile is presented in juxtaposition to China's increasing profile, as occasioned by recent and ongoing power shifts between these two countries. But why should power shifts affect the chances of conflict recidivism or rivalry intensification? Most analysts seem to take it for granted that power shifts are somehow destabilizing, without spelling out the causal mechanisms motivating this expectation. Doesn't the balance of power theory assert that a more equal distribution of capabilities between two leading countries, such as the United States and China, should be conducive to peace and stability? There has been a long line of self-professed realists claiming that bipolarity or bipolarization should enhance the prospects for interstate peace and stability. Viewed from the perspective of power transition theory, shouldn't a latecomer's increased power translate into its greater stake in the existing international order? As the beneficiary of this order (after all, it has improved its position relative to others), shouldn't this rising state