

Special issue on the 'sources of peace and peaceful change in East Asia'¹

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Special issue on the ‘sources of peace and peaceful change in East Asia’¹

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ABSTRACT

East Asia is usually associated with war and conflict. This applies to its historical past, as well as to the present post-Cold War period. In fact, this pessimism on the region has hardened with the worsening structural US-China competition since 2010. Challenging this prevailing view, this special issue argues that the concepts of peace and peaceful change are critical elements to explain East Asian regional dynamics in the post-Cold War period. It poses the following questions: (a) how could peace and peaceful change be analysed conceptually at the regional level?; (b) what type of peace and peaceful change notions are applicable to East Asia?; (c) what are the sources and mechanisms of regional peace in East Asia and its sub-regions and how have the sources and mechanisms changed over the post-Cold War period?; (d) how has the worsening US-China structural competition affected the prospects of peace in East Asia?; and (e) how do the middle powers, namely Japan, South Korea, Australia and Indonesia, contribute to peace and peaceful change in the region? The special issue is the first attempt to systematically apply the concepts of peace and peaceful change on East Asia. The articles identify the sources and mechanisms of peace and peaceful change, apply an eclectic conceptual approach that combines traditional and non-traditional IR theories; and assess the prospects of peace in East Asia in the context of the worsening structural tensions presented by the US-China competition.

KEYWORDS Peace; peaceful change; East Asia; interdependence; institutions

Introduction

¹East Asia² is no stranger to war, conflict and instability, as reflected in its turbulent historical past. Even though the Cold War in East Asia ended in a relatively peaceful manner, this negative perception has continued to define the region throughout the post-Cold War period. This is because the region is mired in a range of strategic challenges that have the ability to

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destabilize the region. These include the tensions on the Taiwan Strait, the instability on the Korean Peninsula caused by North Korea's relentless pursuit of ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programmes, and unresolved territorial disputes both in Northeast Asia (Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute between Japan and China, Takeshima/Tokdo Islands disputes between Japan and South Korea, and Northern Kuriles disputes between Japan and Russia) and in Southeast Asia (the South China Sea territorial disputes between China (and Taiwan) and Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam). Not only are the chances for any resolution of the above challenges low, but the likelihood of these strategic challenges causing further tensions in the region is compounded by two other factors. First, there is high level of mistrust among East Asian states due to a range of factors, such as the unresolved historical legacy. This bilateral mistrust has strained bilateral relations, raised nationalism, and hampered regional integration. Second, the severity of these challenges has increased with the backdrop of China's strategic rise and the worsening competition between the US and China since 2010. This side of the East Asian story has reinforced previous contentions that the region has become 'ripe for rivalry' and the relative peace since the onset of the post-Cold War period has been an aberration for the region (Friedberg, 1993/94; also see Betts, 1993; Layne, 1993; Mearsheimer, 2001, 2010, 2021; Waltz, 2000).

However, the pessimistic analyses outlined above miss out the 'other' side of the East Asian story. Since the peaceful transition between the Cold War to post-Cold War periods, East Asia has experienced relative or limited peace, especially when it has avoided inter-state wars or intense conflicts. This has been referred to in the literature as the 'East Asian Peace' (Bjarnegård & Kreutz, 2017; Tønnesson, 2017; Weissmann, 2012). Instead, East Asia has experienced strengthening economic prosperity through sustained economic growth, progress and development in varying degrees. This has resulted in growing interdependence between member states both at the intra- and inter-regional levels through formal and informal channels. Complementing the economic prosperity and interdependence factor, East Asia has seen a flourishing of institutions covering a range of areas, such as economics, politics, and security both at the ASEAN-led (ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN-Plus-Three, East Asian Summit, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and its plus variant, and several others) and the non ASEAN-led (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Shanghai Cooperation Dialogue, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and others) levels. The strengthened institutionalist framework has promoted regularised dialogue and cooperation, as well as shared norms, to manage behaviour among the states. The region's relative peace supported by the economic and institutionalist factors would not have been possible without the relative strategic

stability ensured by the US preponderance and its extensive alliance network in the region. This continues to be a critical factor of the East Asian architecture even though the US hegemony is being challenged by both China and Russia (other than those who argued for 'East Asian Peace', see Acharya, 2004; Bitzinger & Desker, 2008; Calder & Ye, 2010; Choi, 2016; Choi & Moon, 2010; Kang & Ma, 2018; Kivimaki, 2010; Ross, 1999).³

While recognising the region's challenges, this special issue aims to contribute to the 'other' side of the debate. More specifically, it argues that peace and peaceful change are two relevant and cognate concepts to explain East Asian regional dynamics in the post-Cold War period. The objective is not to argue that peace and peaceful change are the only or the most important concepts to explain East Asia, but to underscore that these concepts are critical complements to the prevailing dominant regional understanding defined by war, conflict and rivalry. Unlike previous attempts to explain peace and stability in East Asia, this special issue contributes to the academic and policy literature in two significant ways.

First, this special issue updates the literature on East Asian peace and stability by incorporating the US-China competition factor into the analyses. Like the end of the Cold War, the worsening US-China competition since 2010 possibly serves as another critical juncture to have initiated an order transition in East Asia. This transition is, on the one hand, caused by China's emergence as the 'new hegemon' or 'driver of global change' supported by its more assertive military and foreign policy strategy (*The Economist*, 2018), and on the other hand, the incumbent hegemon's - the US - perceived relative decline in power and leadership in regional and global affairs since the 2008 economic crisis (Layne, 2018; Heath & Thompson, 2018). The bilateral relationship between the preponderant US and the rising China have deteriorated in all domains and experienced worsening tensions since 2010. If not managed well, this competition has the potential to decouple the bilateral relationship resulting in countries being forced to choose sides between the two great powers, and more seriously, erupt into a hegemonic war triggered by conditions captured by power transition perspectives such as the 'Thucydides Trap' (Gilpin, 1981; Allison, 2017; Friedberg, 2011). Any serious scholarship assessing prospects of peace and peaceful change in East Asia today has to incorporate the US-China competition into its analysis.

Second, in analysing peace and stability in East Asia, the articles are located within the emerging new research agenda on peace and peaceful change as outlined in Paul, Larson, Wivel, Trinkunas, and Emmers (2022) *The Oxford Handbook of Peaceful Change in International Relations*. This research emerged to overcome the little conceptual attention directed to explaining change, especially peaceful change in global affairs. It investigates how and why peaceful changes occur in international relations, which

is a question that has become more important in light of the worsening US-China competition and US-Russia rivalry that threaten to destabilise the global and regional orders. This special issue is the first attempt to systematically apply this conceptual framework focusing on peace and peaceful change on East Asia.⁴ The articles apply this framework provided in Paul (2022), along with other notions of peace available in the IR literature, to argue that peace and peaceful change are critical elements, along with war, uncertainty and conflict, to explain the East Asian regional affairs since the onset of the post-Cold War period. In fact, East Asia has experienced peaceful change since the end of the Cold War and the prospects for peace remains strong despite the escalating US-China tensions since 2010. In analysing the regional affairs through the peace and peaceful change perspective, the articles are guided by the following questions: (a) how could peace and peaceful change be analysed conceptually at the regional level?; (b) what type of peace and peaceful change notions are applicable to East Asia?; (c) what are the sources and mechanisms of regional peace in East Asia and its sub-regions (Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) and how have the sources and mechanisms changed over the post-Cold War period?; (d) how has the worsening US-China structural competition affected the prospects of peace in East Asia?; and (e) how do the middle powers, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and Indonesia, contribute to the peace and peaceful change in the region?

The rest of the article is divided into two main sections. The first starts with a brief overview of how the notion of peace has been applied in the study of East Asia. This is followed by a more detailed description of Paul et al. (2022)'s peace and peaceful change conceptual framework, which all articles have framed their articles around. The second section provides a summary of the six articles and outlines the common themes that run through this collection. The conclusion underscores the urgency of the special issue's theme and findings to contemporary regional affairs, especially in light of the worsening US-China and US-Russia tensions that threatens to dismantle the regional order.

Understanding peace and peaceful change in east asia

Despite its turbulent history, the notion of peace has been previously applied to East Asia, especially to account for the relative or limited peace achieved since the onset of the post-Cold War period. Tønnesson (2017) defined peace as an absence of armed conflict within and between states measured in number of battle deaths (pp. 3-7). With the sharp decline in the region's share of global battle deaths (from 80 per cent 1946-79 period to 6.2 per cent in the 1980-89 period to 1.7 per cent in the 1990s to 1.3 per

cent in 2015 (Tønnesson, 2017, p 10)), East Asia was argued to have achieved some level of peace (also see Bjarnegård & Kreutz, 2017). Kivimäki (2010) argued that East Asia's relative peace is supported not just by a decline in the number of battle deaths, but also in the decline of other types of violence in the region. However, both Tønnesson and Kivimäki were less sanguine about the durability of peace in East Asia due to the presence of conditions that hamper long-term peace in the region. On a more positive note, Weissmann (2012) argued that East Asia has moved beyond war and conflict and has achieved 'stable peace' during the post-Cold War period. Relying on varying levels of peace, Weissmann introduced a peace continuum that has 'crisis' and 'durable peace' at both ends and punctuated in between by 'unstable peace' and 'stable peace'. He argued for 'stable peace', as East Asia is focused on 'engagement, cooperation, and confidence building, on aiming to avoid conflicts and building long-term peace and prosperity, not on pursuing conflict or treating others as potential enemies' (p. 43).

Unlike previous attempts, this special issue is located within the emerging research agenda that focuses on peace and peaceful change in IR, as outlined in the *The Oxford Handbook of Peaceful Change in International Relations* (Paul et al., 2022). All articles in the special issue engaged and/or applied the definitions and measurements of peaceful change as discussed by TV Paul's chapter in this Handbook (Paul, 2022). In the chapter, the concept of peaceful change is defined in a continuum that is marked by a minimalist definition at one end and a maximalist definition at the other end. The minimalist understanding of peaceful change is referred to as a '*change in international relations and foreign policies of states, including territorial or sovereignty agreements that take place without violence or coercive use of force*'; and the maximalist understanding is referred to as a '*transformational change that takes place non-violently at the global, regional, interstate, and societal levels due to various material, normative and institutional factors, leading to deep peace among states, higher levels of prosperity and justice for all irrespective of nationality, race or gender*' (Paul, 2022, 4, italics from original source). In short, the minimalist understanding of peaceful change refers to an 'international change and transformation without the use of military force and war', and the maximalist definition refers to change brought about by 'not only the absence of war, but also the achievement of sustained non-violent cooperation for creating a more just world order' (Paul, 2022, 4). Paul (2022) also incorporates a mix min-max definition for peaceful change. Taken from Karl Deutsch, this is defined as 'the resolution of social problems mutually by institutionalized procedures without resort to largescale physical force' (Deutsch 1957, 5, cited from Paul, 2022, 4). What this means is that states resolve disputes not by war, but through institutions and dialogue (p. 4).

Paul's definition of peaceful change applies to the systemic or international, regional or sub-systemic and the domestic levels. Paul (2022) noted that regional dynamics have a direct impact on global stability and this requires further analyses (p. 17). The focus on stability of the regional order in this special issue, especially in its attention on East Asia, is a response to this call. Since the focus of the special issue is on the region, it would be useful to outline how the minimalist and maximalist definitions of peaceful change apply (Paul, 2022, 4-7). According to Paul, the minimalist 'peaceful *regional change* implies a condition in which states in a region coexist, accepting the rights and responsibilities of each other, and resort to institutional and diplomatic mechanisms for dispute resolution, thereby avoiding war to settle their differences' (Paul 2012, from Paul, 2022, 6, italics from original). A maximalist understanding refers to '... the existence of a highly pluralistic security community in which war is not even thought of as an option and change within this order is the result of institution-based dialogue and compromises among states and nonstate actors.' (Paul, 2022, 6).

Though not all peaceful change transitions are desirable, the articles in this special issue are focused on the varying levels of positive outcomes of peaceful change in East Asia (Paul, 2022, p. 7; Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2018). While all articles are pessimistic on the conditions of 'warm peace' or 'deep peace' (terms that would fall within the maximalist definition of peaceful change) emerging in East Asia due to the external and internal conditions, the articles support the notion that the region has achieved limited peace during the post-Cold War period and that this peace is durable in the coming decades despite the intensified structural competition between the US and China since 2010. This is explained by a variety of characterizations of peace used by the authors in their articles to explain their subject of study, be it the entire East Asian region, the sub-regions (Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) or selected critical themes (namely, institutions and middle powers). Focusing on East Asia, Pempel used the 'peace of the prudent' characterisation to explain the limited peace in the region. Northeast Asia was described by Paul as being in a state of 'cold peace' and by Singh as 'minimal peace'. Focusing on the institutional framework, Kai He utilised the 'institutional peace' characterisation to explain the stability brought about by the institutional competition between the great powers; and Teo used the notion of 'good regional citizenship' to explain the instrumental roles middle powers have in ensuring a stable regional order. Even though some of the articles reach beyond Paul's conception of peaceful change (for example, Pempel's use of Kahler's characterisation of the 'peace of the prudent' and Anthony-Caballero-Emmers' engagement with Johan Galtung's 'negative' and 'positive' peace), all

characterisations neatly fall within either the minimalist or the min-max definitions of peaceful change. The next section summarises the article's arguments and highlights several common themes that run through the articles.

Articles and common themes

The special issue is a collection of six articles covering various theoretical and empirical aspects of peace and peaceful change in East Asia. The articles cover a range of critical issues related to explaining what type of peace has emerged in East Asia since the onset of the post-Cold War period, what are the sources or mechanism of this peace, and assess where the region is headed in the years ahead due to the possible transition of regional order caused by the worsening competition between the US and China. They were written by experts of the region, including leading scholars of international relations theory and international relations of East Asia.

The first article entitled *Sources of Peace in East Asia: Interdependence, Institutions, and Middle Powers* by T. J. Pempel provides a useful historical and contemporary overview of East Asia's trajectory in achieving peace and prosperity that since the onset of the postwar period. Despite this success, it notes that the stability of the East Asian order is facing a serious challenge from the economically and militarily more powerful China and a decreasingly robust and engaged US. While accepting the possibility that such structural shifts could upend the extant regional order, Pempel contends that three powerful counterweights are working to withstand disruptive conflicts and foster peaceful change, namely strong and rising economic interdependence, expanding institutionalisation, and active preservation efforts by middle powers, especially Japan and South Korea. Each of these counterweights are further elaborated in the subsequent articles.

T. V. Paul's article entitled *Realism, Liberalism and Regional Orders in East Asia: Toward a Hybrid Approach* sets the stage in conceptual terms on the application of IR theory and the concepts of peace and peaceful change at the regional level, namely on East Asia. Despite emerging as a key theatre of great power competition in the 21st century and faced with a range of regional strategic challenges, East Asia has avoided war in the post-Cold War period. Paul notes that Northeast Asia (outside of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan-China area) could be argued as being in a state of 'cold peace' and Southeast Asia in a state of 'normal peace'. This is explained by a hybrid approach that comprises two variants of realism - balance of power and hegemonic stability - and the key arguments in liberalism. As both theoretical approaches have partial applications for understanding the East Asian order, this article defends the adoption of a hybrid approach to explain the regional dynamics over diverse time periods for the different

sub-regions in East Asia. While the presence of both hegemony and balance of power could prevent major wars for a period, these theoretical perspectives, according to Paul, have failed to resolve the pre-existing regional disputes. Hence, it is important to incorporate economic interdependence into the analysis, as this factor mitigates 'spiraling tendencies' and raises the costs of conflict and war. This hybrid approach is adopted by several articles in this issue.

One of them is Bhubhindar Singh's *Minimal Peace in Northeast Asia: A Realist-Liberal Explanation*. This article applies a hybrid conceptual approach to explain the condition of 'minimal peace' in Northeast Asia. Challenging the prevailing view that conflict and war defines Northeast Asian regional order, this article argues that the peaceful transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War period has led to a state of minimal peace in the sub-region due to three realist-liberal factors: America's hegemony, strong economic interdependence and a stable institutional structure. These factors promoted economic prosperity, maintained a stable regional balance of power and mitigated the negative effects of political and strategic tensions between the Northeast Asian states. Singh further argues that the sub-region's minimal peace would be durable in the coming decades despite the worsening Sino-US competition from 2010. While the economic interdependence and institutional building factors have shown resilience, the US hegemony faces a robust challenge from China. Nevertheless, the article argues that the US hegemony would also remain durable because of America's enduring relative strategic and economic advantages over China, the expanded role of America's regional allies to preserve US preponderance and China's problems in building an alternative regional order.

The next two articles shift our attention to institutions and their roles in contributing to peace and peaceful change. In *Keeping the Peace in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Quest for Positive Peace*, Anthony-Caballero and Emmers focus on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s experience in managing peace and security in Southeast Asia. Despite the range of challenges, the article notes that Southeast Asia has transformed itself and achieved peaceful change since the end of the Cold War era. One of the major contributors to this peace has been ASEAN and its ability to manage intra-mural relations. Nevertheless, ASEAN's record in maintaining regional peace and security has also been seriously challenged, particularly at the domestic and transnational levels. The article argues that the Southeast Asian experience of peaceful change calls for a different framework of analysis that is beyond the traditional IR theories, which the authors argue have failed to provide a convincing explanation on how regional peace has prevailed. The article shows that ASEAN has been successful in contributing to the 'positive peace' in Southeast Asia by paying

close attention to the interaction between domestic challenges and international politics. To understand ASEAN's contribution to the positive peace, the article incorporates notions of comprehensive security and the building of national and regional resilience into its analysis to understand the peaceful transformation of Southeast Asia.

In *China's Rise, Institutional Balancing, and (Possible) Peaceful Order Transition in the Asia Pacific*, Kai He challenges the view that China and the US are falling into a 'Thucydides trap', which could cause a hegemonic war between the two. The article contends that the ongoing international order transition is different from previous historical order transitions. Instead of using military means to change the international order, both China and the US are increasingly relying on various institutional balancing strategies to outdo each other and shape the international order. Using the AIIB and the ARF as case studies, the article argues that institutional competition in the form of institutional balancing strengthens the dynamics and utility of international institutions, encourages states to offer new public goods, and potentially ensure a peaceful order transition of the international system. This institutional competition, according to Kai He, will lead to 'institutional peace'. The article, however, notes two caveats that underlie the institutional peace: the continued validity of the MAD nuclear deterrence that is critical to prevent a hegemonic war between the US and China and a limited degree of ideological antagonism between the US and China that is critical to prevent an emergence of a Cold War-type of a confrontation and a divided international order.

Turning our attention to the role of middle powers in contributing to peace and peaceful change in East Asia, Sarah Teo's *Middle Powers amid Sino-U.S. Rivalry: Assessing the 'Good Regional Citizenship' of Australia and Indonesia* article argues for expanded role of middle powers amid intensifying Sino-US rivalry. Teo notes that middle powers in East Asia have contributed towards regional peaceful change through a variety of policies, namely involving proactive strengthening of inclusive multilateralism, enhancing of the rules-based order, and contributing to bridging efforts between competing powers in East Asia. This article introduces the concept of 'good regional citizenship' to capture such behaviour of middle powers and it applies this concept on two key middle powers in East Asia - Australia and Indonesia. While both countries have exercised good regional citizenship, their specific strategies or the outcomes of their initiatives on regional dynamics have varied. This is because of their relations with the respective major powers and their general foreign policy strategies. While Australia's good regional citizenship is tied to the preservation of US leadership in East Asia vis-à-vis the rise of other regional powers, Indonesia's good regional citizenship is more focused on narrowing the gaps among regional actors through mechanisms led by ASEAN.

There are several common themes that run through the articles. First, the collection of articles start on the premise that East Asia could be analysed as a single region. This is despite the diversified nature of the sub-regions, namely Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, in terms of the distribution of power among states, political systems and regime types, existence of territorial disputes, historical legacy, level of nationalism within states, religion and ethnicity issues, strength of institutionalism and other factors. These differences account for the type of peace that dominates the sub-regions. For example, the strong institutional framework and a stable balance of power have resulted in 'positive peace' in Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia's 'minimal peace' is a result of its weak institutional framework, unstable balance of power and the unresolved historical legacy. Yet, it is plausible to treat the two sub-regions as a single unit because of their deep interactions in relation to population flows, trade, businesses, air and sea traffic and telecommunications. Moreover, both sub-regions are governed by an overlapping institutional structure represented by multilateral and alliance networks that tie their political, economic and security relations closely (Tønnesson, 2017, xiv, 9-10).

Second, while the sources of peaceful change are usually grounded in liberal factors originating from the Kantian liberal peace argument that rest on the economic interdependence, democracy and international institutions factors (Russett & Oneal, 2001), the articles here underscore East Asia's unique experience towards achieving peace and peaceful change. A critical finding was the important role realist variables had, together with the liberal factors, in explaining the condition of limited peace in East Asia. These realist variables were the regional balance of power, the role of the US hegemony since the postwar period and its continued resilience, the power transition factor caused by the worsening US-China structural competition since 2010, the augmented role of secondary states, namely middle powers and US allies and partners, to maintain the regional balance of power and protect the regional order, the use of institutions by the great powers (US and China) to compete against each other and the importance of the nuclear deterrence to manage the structural competition between the US and China.

Yet, the articles also identify the limits of realism to explain the complex situation in the region where there are several sources of stability that go against realist logic. In this regard, the articles rely more on liberal theory and its variants, namely commercial liberalism and neo-liberal institutionalism, and to a lesser extent on the social constructivist approach. In terms of liberal variables, instead of the Kantian tripod for peace, the articles underscore the importance of growing economic interdependence between the East Asian economies and the strengthening institutionalisation at the

regional and sub-regional levels either within the ASEAN-led multilateral order or non-ASEAN-led multilateral order. The former promotes economic growth and development, as well as raises the costs of war or conflict, and the latter promotes mechanisms for engagement, cooperation, dialogue and even shared norms to regulate behaviour of states. However, the articles note that democratic ideology is a weaker contributing factor for peace and peaceful change in East Asia. To be sure, there are democratic states, such as Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia with relatively strong institutions to uphold the democratic practices, ideals and values. However, as some of the articles point out, several factors undermine the positive effects of democracy in affecting peace and peaceful change in East Asia. These include Communist China's contribution to minimal peace since its economic reforms of the 1970s, the inability of democratic Japan and South Korea to overcome fluctuating political tensions triggered by historical antagonism, and East Asia's achievement of relative peace since the onset of the post-Cold War period despite being home to several illiberal democracies (Kivimaki, 2010).

Instead of democratic states, the articles note the critical role middle powers have in managing the tensions between the great powers and ensuring peace and stability. This is achieved through a variety of strategies, such as reinforcing the multilateral institutional framework, promoting a rules-based order and serving as 'bridges' between the competing powers and their initiatives. In fact, as the articles point out, these states have an elevated role in the context of the US-China competition. As the articles by Pempel and Teo show, middle powers manage the negative effects of the US-China competition and contribute to peace and stability of the region in diverse ways. While Japan, South Korea and Australia clearly protect and initiate strategies to maintain the extant US-led order, Indonesia's strategy is to unify the competing visions of the great powers through ASEAN-led mechanisms.

Third, to rigorously apply the concepts of peace and peaceful change on East Asia, the articles adopt eclectic approaches that combined traditional IR theories and their related variables, along with concepts beyond IR theory. This eclectic approach reflect the conditions relevant to the East Asian context. For example, Paul, Pempel and Singh utilised a hybrid realist-liberal approach where the effects of realism (regional balance of power, hegemonic stability, and role of secondary states or middle powers) are combined with the key variables from commercial liberalism and neo-liberal institutionalism, such as economic and trade interdependence and institutional mechanisms. Kai He combined the effects of the ideology, status and legitimacy factors to re-read hegemonic competition in institutionalist terms. Instead of a unstable power transition caused by US-China

competition, He argued that institutional balancing strategies could mitigate the negative effects of a power transition between great powers. Anthony-Caballero and Emmers not only combined the effects of realism, liberalism and social constructivism, but also incorporated notions of comprehensive security and regional and national resilience to explain how Southeast Asia overcome 'intermestic' challenges to achieve 'positive peace'. To explain the widening role of middle powers in maintaining regional order, Teo used the notion of 'good regional citizenship to explain how middle powers assume outsized roles in promoting inclusive multilateralism, enhancing the rules-based order, and serving as a 'bridge' between great powers and their initiatives. By taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of each theoretical perspective in IR and beyond, the articles responded to the complex nature of the East Asia to reach a nuanced analysis on the condition of limited peace and peaceful change in East Asia.

Fourth, the articles incorporated the implications of the worsening US-China competition to the East Asia order. While mindful of the negative effects of the US-China competition on the region's stability, the collection of articles demonstrate that the hard earned relative peace in East Asia remains resilient for the coming decades. The negative effects of the US-China competition would be mitigated by a range of factors, such as the resilience of US power and leadership in the region, the growing economic interdependence between the East Asian states and beyond, the strengthening institutionalism in the region both to promote engagement and counter-balance competing powers, and the widening role of middle powers, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and Indonesia in maintaining a stable regional order.

Conclusion

The collection of articles in this special issue shed light on the utility of peace and peaceful change notions to explain East Asian dynamics in the post-Cold War period. The objective is not to argue that peace and peaceful change are the only or most important concepts to explain East Asia, but to underscore their role as critical complements to the prevailing dominant regional understanding that is defined by war and conflict. The articles identified the varying notions of peace and peaceful change that could be applied to East Asia and the various sources and mechanisms of peace and peaceful change relevant to East Asia, even in the context of intensifying structural US-China competition. Conceptually, the articles are located within the emerging research agenda focusing on peaceful change, as outlined in *The Oxford Handbook of Peaceful Change in International Relations*. The focus on East Asia as a case study have enriched the Handbook's

peaceful change framework in conceptual terms. Empirically, the articles shed light on the understated condition of peace in East Asia and the critical sources and mechanisms that have facilitated this peace since the onset of the post-Cold War period.

The articles usefully highlighted various sources and mechanisms that have contributed to the hard-earned peace in post-Cold War East Asia. These included economic growth and development, which is an important domestic source of legitimacy for all states and governments; strong economic interdependence both at the intra- and inter-regional levels, open-trade, which has even led China to apply to join the CPTPP; sustained support for multilateral institutionalism; and a stable regional balance of power that ensures strategic stability. It is critical that experts and policymakers in East Asia and beyond take note of the profound contribution these mechanisms have had on making peace in the region. To sustain this peace, more resources should be diverted towards strengthening these mechanisms. At the same time, the articles also highlighted the numerous challenges that could dismantle the peaceful order in East Asia. Experts and policymakers should be aware of these challenges and manage them carefully to ensure the durability of peace in East Asia in the coming decades. As the history of East Asia show, experts and policymakers should appreciate and understand the utility of the peace achieved by East Asia in the post-Cold War period. This would serve as a foundation to ensure that this period of peace, whether relative or limited, does not become an aberration in the East Asian story.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. I would like to thank TV Paul for his insightful comments of an earlier draft of this article.
2. In this special issue, East Asia is broadly defined as incorporating the Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and Australasia sub-regions. To add to this list, East Asia also includes the United States, which has widespread political, economic and strategic interests in the region and has been a critical source of stability through its large-scale military presence in Japan and South Korea. All articles in this issue adopted this conception of East Asia. Even though Anthony-Caballero and Emmers utilised the Indo-Pacific geographical term, the content of their article is focused on East Asia.
3. There have also been attempts to go back to the past to argue for peace or stability in Northeast/East Asia, especially during the Sinocentric Order. See Kang (2003, 2007) for an analysis using hegemonic stability theory and Kelly (2012) using a cultural-constructivist approach.
4. This project complements other special issues put together on the notions of peace and peaceful change. For an early introduction of peaceful change as a new research agenda in the study of international relations, see the articles published in a special issue in *International Studies Review* (Paul, 2018). For analyses on peaceful change and international institutions, see the articles published in a roundtable in the journal *Ethics and International*

Affairs (see He et al., 2020). For analyses on the interplay between (de-)globalisation and the liberal international order, see the special issue published in *International Affairs* (Paul and Kornprobst, 2021). This research on peaceful change is part of the Global Research Network on Peaceful Change (GRENPEC), which was established in 2019 (see <https://www.grenpec.com>).

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