Book Review of Daojiong Zha and Weixing Hu. Building a Neighborly Community: Post-Cold War China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006. pp. v + 259.

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The end of the Cold War in 1991 brought about structural changes to the global geostrategic landscape but did not usher in a completely new era in East Asia. Unresolved issues remain, such as the division lines on the Korean peninsula and across the Taiwan Straits, simmering Sino-Japanese hostility, and continuing United States predominance in regional security. Against this background of the early 1990s, in “Building a Neighborly Community: Post-Cold War China, Japan, and Southeast Asia,” Daojiong Zha and Weixing Hu examine the collective efforts of East Asian countries in forging a regional environment conducive to their security and development. Refusing a single perspective, whether that be of realism, liberalism, or constructivism, in their analysis, the authors opt for a “problem-driven approach” instead, evaluating selective issues in the evolution of regional identity among China, Japan, and Southeast Asia dated from the 1970s to the early 2000s. The intra-regional community building efforts led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are noted as effective in managing or avoiding internal conflict and engaging external powers. As such, six out of nine chapters in the book are centered around the relationships China and Japan have with Southeast Asia, their political-economic diplomacy, and the maritime security challenges in the South China Sea. The authors conclude that, because community building among East Asian countries is a multi-level, multi-layered process that allows

for both cooperation and competition to take place, their path toward structured regionalism is possible so long as they can continue to build a neighborly community. This neighborliness captures the East Asian states' participation in intra-regional forums based on geographical proximity and political necessity, rather than based on consensus in ideologies or political systems.

The book, written by two authors from China, contributes a non-Western-centric perspective that is much needed in the literature on the post-Cold War era. For example, the authors highlight failed leadership from the United States and rapid responses from China and Japan during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The event then proved to be a turning point for China's interactions with Southeast Asia, allowing Chinese commitment to the region to shine in contrast to an ambivalent United States. It is also noteworthy that the characterization of a neighborly East Asian community in which a nation-state functions as a neighbor in a village, learning to respect and care for each other, echoes the Confucian idea of social harmony. The authors make no explicit mention of this in the book, though invoking Confucianism, one of the most influential ideologies in East Asia, may help one understand the trajectory of peaceful interactions between the small and big states in the region.

The book, published back when China had not overtaken Japan in terms of economic size, is not without its shortcomings. An excessive sense of optimism permeates the pages; some cases are well-supported but not all of them. The authors praise the ASEAN way of diplomacy as one that has driven regional cooperation initiatives and brought the big powers together to respond in kind. Although they acknowledge that the bloc's incremental approach and consensus building process can lead to slow and time-consuming decision making, they seem to be too confident in the member states' ability to build constructive engagement. This was proved not to be the case in 2012 when, for the first time in its 45-year history, ASEAN foreign ministers failed to issue a joint

communique at their summit in Cambodia (Bower, 2012). The Cambodian chair, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hor Nam Hong, who allegedly shared the draft statement with Chinese interlocutors, had rejected the wording regarding a confrontation between the Philippines and China at Scarborough Shoal and Vietnam's desire to address exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The turn of event pointed to weakness and disunity within the ASEAN, one that can be exploited by China for its own agenda setting. The fact that Cambodia was pressured by China enough to keep the South China Sea off the public statement proved that the construction of an ASEAN-led neighborly community in the region is illusionary. In 2016, the bloc even retracted a statement that expressed "serious concerns" over developments in the South China Sea. Such incidents undermine the authors' argument that the East Asian community building model differs from the European and North American dynamics because small states here do not necessarily follow the steps of big powers.

The lack of foresight on such problems within the ASEAN and its interactions with China is attributable to the authors' failure to discuss the association's internal mechanism for maritime dispute settlement. This is especially problematic given that the ASEAN has no clear mechanisms to engage members not directly involved in the maritime dispute and in resolving the dispute between members having overlapping claims in the contested sea. The underlying cause of disunity, then, is not exogenous influence such as from China, but is the existing institutional weakness. Consultation and consensus building alone, as Zha and Hu highlight, are necessary but not sufficient in conflict resolution. This is reflected in the chronic difficulty of the ASEAN and China finalizing a binding Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. As of 2019, two decades have passed since the ASEAN first issued a statement on the South China Sea disputes, during which time both parties have only been able to agree on a nonbinding Declaration on the

Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and a single draft for the COC in the disputed sea. Thus, the authors' conclusion on the possibility of ASEAN-led regionalization is weakened because they have overlooked the importance of establishing binding institutional mechanisms to enforce decisions and monitor compliance. Overlooking this factor, the authors have missed a chance to explore the underlying barriers or potential facilitators for neighborly community building in East Asia such as culture, religions, political-economy, state of development of the transition economies in the region (Vuong, 2018; Vuong et al., 2018). Failing to account for these deep-running issues in their analyses, might be a why the authors retain such optimistic outlook.

Overall, the book is presented in a logical and coherent manner, albeit repetitive at times. This is perhaps because each chapter may be read as a separate article with its own introduction, conclusion, and extensive notes. It provides an informative but unusually optimistic look into various core issues in regional building in East Asia during the post-Cold War era.

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