

***Explaining the East Asian Peace: A Research Story.* By Stein Tønneson. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. Softcover: 263pp.**

The standard trope in any discussion about East Asian security over recent decades has been on the uncertainty of the security environment, generally followed by the assertion that we live in dangerous times. And there has indeed been much uncertainty and some dangerous times. Stein Tønneson's book, however, moves away somewhat from the uncertainty and the danger and instead examines the (relative) peace which the region has enjoyed over the last three decades or so. In the eyes of the author — programme leader for a large and experienced international team hosted by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University in Sweden — this is a much more interesting topic than asking the more normal question: “Why conflict and what causes it?”

In four parts, chapters really, Tønneson asks and answers, from his point of view, the big questions: How do we explain the region's generally peaceful nature? What should we make of China? Is the peace viable? and What could the future hold? Running through these issues is discussion of a six-year research programme at Uppsala in which the different perspectives, theories and approaches brought by the participants to the project are aired. This discussion, the “research story” of the subtitle, is as useful as the overall conclusions as it lays out the epistemological and methodological debates within the research project and reminds us that we all have our own analytical perspectives, and that the facts and issues we choose to privilege can reasonably and legitimately be disputed by others.

Tønneson recognizes that his definitions of peace — “the absence of armed conflict” (p. 3) — and of armed conflict — a “contested incompatibility” between two parties one of which is a state government resulting in “at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year” (p. 3) — are contestable, and he spends time usefully discussing his approach. Both regional interstate and intrastate conflict are discussed, with due recognition that many of the conflicts have both international and domestic components and a clear delineation between the forms of conflict is not always possible (p. 25). Throughout, Tønneson discusses his conclusions, explores possible alternative conclusions, and explains why he has reached his conclusions.

Part One is a discussion of possible reasons for the enduring regional peace. Factors considered include the presence of border agreements, peace agreements and, Tønneson's own preferred answer, "developmental peace" which shows that the East Asian Peace is "linked to the emergence of the 'developmental state'" (p. 39). Those states that have privileged economic development have seen external and internal stability as a prerequisite and have generally been at peace. Countries such as North Korea, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines have not promoted national development and all continue to suffer from various kinds of conflict.

China is the key to regional peace and China's position is examined in Part Two. The question is "will Beijing continue to adhere to its strategy for Peaceful Development and avoid using force in its foreign relations"? (p. 81) Not surprisingly, Tønneson finds that scholarly predictions about China (and he analyses dozens in this part of the book) tend to vary according to most recent developments, with no systematic difference apparent between analytical schools. A very rich chapter, but you read the analyses and make your own pick. All offer insights, none offers certainty.

Part Three examines the concept of peace itself and the viability of sustainable peace in East Asia. Tønneson is firmly on the side of narrow definitions of peace — the absence of conflict — rather than more expansive definitions that require, for example, trust, social justice or gender equality. He makes both normative and scholarly arguments (pp. 148–50); normative on the grounds that absence of conflict deaths is a good in itself and scholarly because the narrow definition allows us to see movement in international and domestic relationships and more easily allow us to determine causes. Fair points, though debatable.

Tønneson's conclusions are encouraging. We are not likely soon to see an outbreak of interstate war (p. 154) and the factors working for and against internal peace are well enough known (pp. 167–93), even if solutions are more difficult.

The final part of the book examines grounds for both optimism and pessimism for a continuing East Asian peace. Tønneson gives ten proposals (pp. 216–25) to maximize the grounds for optimism and minimize the pessimistic factors. Many of these — strengthen national and international law, build regional institutions — will come as no surprise, but the first, "set green growth as top priority" (p. 216) is interesting for its emphasis on the environment. The point seems to be that for top-level decision-makers in some regional

countries, peace is “a means to achieve other aims” (p. 217) (such as economic development and cleaning up the environment) rather than a priority goal in itself. If peace is necessary to achieve the higher goals, then a strategy of focusing on those goals will more likely lead to peace than if peace itself is the end.

Overall, this is an excellent *tour d'horizon* of the East Asian security environment, the factors that shape it and the scholarly arguments on how to improve it. The book makes good use of graphs and tables to clarify its analysis. I recommend this book not only for scholars of the region, but also for regional policymakers involved in security decisions.

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