THE ASIANIZATION OF EAST ASIAN SECURITY AND THE UNITED STATES' ROLE

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The Asianization of East Asian security has been unfolding in the forms of the emergence of a genuinely regional security complex, the Asian initiative of security dialogue, and the assertion of an Asian way of diplomacy. Ironically, the uncertainties surrounding the United States' role are a key factor driving regionalization and, at the same time, a critical security issue in the emerging regional security complex. The essentiality of the U.S. role provides Washington with key leverage to ensure a role commensurate with its centrality in East Asian security. In light of the danger and opportunities regionalization presents for U.S. policy, it is vital to distinguish rhetoric from reality and to discern paradoxical developments in the Asianization movement. By its continued commitment to working with other regional powers, and its activism in promoting security multilateralism through ASEAN-Regional Forum (ARF), the U.S. can ensure that regionalization leads to an Asia-Pacific security complex that contains threats wherever they arise.

A current buzzword in East Asia is “Asianization.” Despite the diversity of the region and the contested nature of an “Asian identity,” an Asian consciousness is apparently on the rise. Political and intellectual elites in the region are attempting to articulate a set of Asian values distinct from those of the West. On human rights, a regional declaration was formulated, with only the Japanese dissenting, in Spring 1993, three months before the World Conference on Human Rights. In the Asia-Pa-
cific Economic Cooperation (APEC), political struggles over the identity, pace, and structure of the only official multilateral economic forum have often been waged along the fault line between the Western and East Asian members, with two divergent visions of how to organize the regional political economy. The Malaysian prime minister Mahathir’s caution against APEC being “hijacked” by the United States, and his boycotting the 1993 Seattle APEC quasi-summit convened by President Bill Clinton, were but another dramatic indication of the Asianization movement in East Asia.

Yet every single claim of anything special about Asia, be it in political economy or international relations, has confronted a rebuttal as a “myth” in the West. Attempts at forging an Asian identity are said to be no more than a “chimera.”¹ The East Asian economic model has been rejected as not a miracle of greater efficiency, not unlike the now-repudiated Stalinist Soviet economy, bound to stagnate following an early spurt of growth prompted by vast input of physical resources. Thus it is the model of “perspiration rather than inspiration.”² In terms of security, there is nothing “East Asian” about it either, and the claim of “Asianism” in Southeast Asian countries is nothing but “the realpolitik strategy of pre-emptive kow-tow” to the predominant power of China.³ Those countering the Asian “myths” generally argue that the attempt to rhetorize Asianism is in essence an expression of “inverted orientalism,” viz., the East Asian elites’ tendency to identify the “West” in antithesis

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