David Kang’s “China Reassures East Asia” looked at why has China’s rise not led to a security dilemma in East Asia? and why does China communicate restraint, and more importantly, why do the East Asian states believe it? He explained that China is a good case study for an analysis of Asian security because “China is a hard case for stability”, meaning that, as opposed to predictions made by the realist school of thought which essentially projected instability and a conflict-prone environment in East Asia, China’s rise has not provoked any balancing behaviors from regional powers in East Asia. Kang took issues with balance of power school which projected China’s rise to destabilize the regional order, and also criticized the power transition school that basically argued “most likely chance for conflict is in the context of a rapidly rising power.”

Kang said that stability is a function of both material and nonmaterial factors, and that China has clearly and credibly communicated its preferences to East Asian states. He argued that the conventional theories of IR, especially in realist school, looked at material factors like the distribution of power in East Asia and downplayed non-material factors like perceived intentions of China by regional actors. Thus, Kang said an analysis of both material and non-material factors is necessary to understand why predicted outcomes have not come to be.

Kang’s analysis of Asia includes North East Asia (Japan, Korea and China) and South East Asia (Taiwan and ASEAN), and he breaks the region by two categories – relative size of regional powers compared to China and relationship with an offshore balancer (US). He argued that South Korea and the Philippines were in flux, while Taiwan and Japan were very close in terms of their relationship with the US.

His motive to analyze when preponderant power is stable is a question arising from China’s signaling of restraint. He argued that a rising power’s benign, non-aggression attitude to the region and international community makes up of a microfoundation of China’s rising hegemony and regional stability of East Asia. A rising power was not always costly to regional powers and therefore other regional states did not always have to form a balancing coalition to check a rising power. Thus, a rising power may not only impose cost but also generate benefits to regional powers. He illustrated this point by showing that South Korea, Japan and Vietnam increased its economic trade with China and that rising China actually created more benefits than costs to East Asian states.

China has clearly communicated its commitment to restraint and cooperation to her neighbors. Beijing’s rise has been has been “peaceful” for its domestic regime security. China has resolved its territorial disputes peacefully with Vietnam, Russia and its neighboring states, and joined regional multilateral institutions such as ARF (Asia Regional Forum), ASEAN+3 and ACFTA (Asia-China Free Trade Agreement). Regional powers had not clearly formed a balancing coalition vis-à-vis the US; Vietnam, despite its hostile history, enjoyed a cooperative relationship with China; the Philippines got closer to China and distanced away from the US compared to 1995. Apparently, he argued that Taiwan was the only state in East Asia that “clings to the US.”

He also argued that “the US’s influence has receded so much more than what we realize in the United States.” As example, he cited China’s increasing and dominant leadership role in the six-party talk (US-China-North Korea-South Korea-Japan) to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and the US’s decreasing political influence on the
Korean Peninsula. He added that the US was heavily focused on Iraq while these regional powers were not, thereby diminishing the US’s influence in the region. Further, the empirical evidence shows how Sino-Japan economic ties had been strengthened despite some territorial and historical disputes: China passed the United States as the largest exporter to Japan in 2002, China is Japan's second-largest trading partner for total trade. He argued that regional powers in East Asia are more susceptible to China’s leadership than Japan’s leadership. Despite this, Japan had not shown any evidences for potential balancing behaviors against China.

Kang concluded by emphasizing China’s preferences as important as material factors in determining stability in East Asia. Moreover, he added that a number of factors such as economic growth, domestic political changes and leadership may influence “whether China continues to reassure Asia.”

Kang made his own predictions about the future of East Asia. He anticipated that East Asian states will increasingly lean towards China, and if forced to choose between the US and China, EA states may choose China. Further, he expected that an American attempt to form a balancing coalition against China would be problematic, that a U.S. drawdown of military bases will not cause insecurity or instability and that no Asian state will involve itself with Taiwan-China.