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국제학석사학위논문

**A Study on China's Asian Regional Policy**  
**Focusing on the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping Eras**

후진타오(胡锦涛)와 시진핑(习近平) 시기  
중국의 아시아 정책 비교연구

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서울대학교 국제대학원  
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**A Study on China's Asian Regional Policy  
Focusing on the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping Eras**

**by**

**Tae Woong, Na**

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Master of International Studies (M.I.S.)

Graduate School of International Studies  
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# A Study on China's Asian Regional Policy Focusing on the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping Eras

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# Abstract

## **A Study on China's Asian Regional Policy Focusing on the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping Eras**

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For more than decades, Asian region has been always the China's strategic main theater. China has traditionally viewed the region not only as a buffer zone from the external pressure, but also as a stepping stone to becoming the global superpower in the international stage. Since 1990s, Chinese leaderships have been increasingly stressed the strategic importance of the Asia region and thus gradually developed its Asian regional policy under the name of the peripheral policy (周边政策). Based on the Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum "TaoGuangYangHui (韬光养晦)", China has continually put efforts not only to shape the external environment stable and peaceful to continue its national growth, but also to effectively respond to external pressures attempting to contain it. However, recently there have been heated controversies over whether China's regional policy changed significantly from the past with its increasing power and presence.

In this context, this study is designed to conduct a comparative analysis between the two recent Chinese regime- Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Xi Jinping (习近平)- in order to answer whether the Chinese Asian regional policy is significantly shifting from the past under the new leadership. Based on neo-classical realism as a theoretical approach and an analytical literature review of authoritative primary and secondary resources, this paper suggests that the Asian regional policy has been increasingly becoming more proactive and assertive, and will continue to move away from the existing low-profile strategy. While adopting the long-held two-pronged policy of pursuing regional stability and safeguarding its core interests, China during the first term of Xi showed a more unswerving and assertive diplomatic gestures in both its diplomatic words and behaviors. With the current growing complexity and uncertainty in the regional order, China's foreign policy toward the region will be one of the most critical variables in shaping the future path of the Asian region.

**Keywords:** China's Asian Regional Policy, Neo-classical Realism, Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Leadership Perception, Assertive Behaviors

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## Abbreviation

<b>ADIZ</b>	Air Defense Identification Zone
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>APEC</b>	Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BAF</b>	Boao Asia Forum
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CICA</b>	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia
<b>CPCCC</b>	Communist Party of China Central Committee
<b>CPDA</b>	China Public Diplomacy Association
<b>CJK FTA</b>	China-Japan-Korea Free Trade Agreement
<b>DCPSC</b>	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea
<b>FFYW</b>	FenFaYouWei (奋发有为)
<b>FTA</b>	Free Trade Agreement
<b>FTAAP</b>	Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NPC</b>	National People's Congress
<b>NSC</b>	National Security Commission

<b>PKO</b>	Peace Keeping Operation
<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing Power Parity
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>RCEP</b>	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>TGYH</b>	TaoGuangYangHui (韬光养晦)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>YSZW</b>	YouSouZuoWei (有搜作为)

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## I. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the rise of China and its following impacts on the current international order have been regarded as one of the most drastic changes in modern international relations. As one scholar once put it, the rise of China “will undoubtedly be one of the great dramas of the twenty-first century<sup>1</sup>”. So much have been written and discussed regarding the astonishing growth rate of Chinese national power and its increasing impacts on both regional and international level. Many analysts and scholars in and out have consistently attempted to answer some fundamental question of what is involved in this momentous phenomenon and how it would bring changes to the current regional and international world order, largely dominated by the small portion of Western developed countries today<sup>2</sup>.

Among the various intriguing topics in this field, China’s rapid national growth and influence on the regional dynamic have drawn a much attention to both Chinese and foreign observers. Looking at the current power status of China, it is hardly deniable that China is already a regional great power, exerting tremendous influences on the current regional order. China became the second-largest economy in 2010, surpassing that of Japan, and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) now soared to more than \$13 trillion US dollars<sup>3</sup>. If calculated with Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) index, it already overtook the United States as the largest economy in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> John G Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008): 23.

<sup>2</sup> Derek McDougall, “Responses to ‘rising China’ in the East Asian Region: Soft Balancing with Accommodation,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, no. 73 (2012): 1-2

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Open Data (2020), available at <https://data.worldbank.org/> (accessed Mar 28)

Militarily, it is now the third military power in the world with an estimated 250 billion dollars in its military expenditure in 2018, accounting for 14% of the global military expenditure<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, along with its increased economic and military power, Chinese government has been also putting efforts to advance its soft power through developing its own developmental model and promote its traditions and cultures since early 2000s in order to expand its political presence on both regional and global stage.

Amid its ambitious path to becoming truly respected global power competing with the United States, Chinese leaderships have been increasingly aware of the strategic importance of the Asian region and thus stressed elaborating the foreign policy toward the region. For more than decades, Asian region has been always China's strategic main theater in which all aspects of its national interests exist. China has traditionally viewed the region not only as a shield or buffer zone from the external powers of the great powers, but also as a stepping stone to becoming the global great power. In this sense, during the reform era, Chinese leaders and policy makers have gradually developed its regional policy- or 'periphery policy (周边政策)' as often named in Chinese discourse- under the Deng Xiaoping (邓小平)'s famous dictum "TaoGuangYangHui (韬光养晦, TGYH)," normally referring to 'hiding one's capabilities and biding one's time'. The strategic importance of the region in China's overall diplomacy priority is increasingly becoming stressed. The relatively recent

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<sup>4</sup> SIPRI, Military Expenditure Database, available at <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (accessed Mar 28)

event of the unprecedented Work Forum on Chinese Peripheral Diplomacy (周边外交业务座谈会) in 2013, and the new leader's emphasis on 'New Asian Security (新亚洲安全观)' all reflects the China's intent to make its regional diplomacy a strategic priority in overall Chinese diplomacy agendas in coming years.

According to previous literatures and studies regarding the main objectives of the China's Asian regional policy, two things are generally shared and agreed among prominent scholars in this field. The first and probably the most important strategic goal of Chinese regional policy is "to secure and shape a security, economic, and political environment that is conducive to China's economic, social and political development<sup>5</sup>". Continuing economic development is thought to be the most important factor for stabilizing domestic politics and moving forward to becoming the great power in the global stage. Therefore, ensuring and shaping stable and peaceful external environment for China to continue its national development is a central goal in its strategic thinking toward the region. Moreover, there has been a strong need for the Chinese government to effectively respond to the US-led China containment policy and so-called the 'China Threat Theory (中国威胁论)' that has been widely shared among neighboring countries with the rise of China. The rapid growth of its

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<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Shaun Breslin, "Understanding China's Regional Rise: Interpretations, Identities and Implications," *International Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2009): 817–35.; Zhang Yunling, and Tang Shiping, "China's Regional Strategy." In *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, ed. David Shambaugh, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 48–68; Suisheng, Zhao, "China's Approaches toward Regional Cooperation in East Asia: Motivations and Calculations," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 68 (2011): 53–67; Michael D Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," *China Leadership Monitor* 44 (2014): 1–43.

comprehensive power has provided plausible reasons for regional states to feel threatened or be feared by how China would behave with its grown power and status in managing various kinds of regional affairs.

Meanwhile, there have been also some heated debates and controversies over whether Chinese regional policy and its diplomatic postures have been changed with its increased power and influence in the region. Particularly, some analysts and pundits in the field have constantly suggested that there have been substantial changes and adjustments in recent Chinese regional strategy since late 2009, and even more with the new leadership transition taken place in 2012. They often argue that despite no fundamental changes in its official statement and rhetoric of the ‘peaceful development road’, China’s diplomatic behaviors have seemingly become more proactive and assertive<sup>6</sup>, moving away from its long-held diplomatic tradition of TGYH stance. For example, China’s strong reaction to US’s selling arms to Taiwan 2010 and Japan’s detention of Chinese fishing boat sailors in 2010, declaration of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in East China Sea in 2014, gradually intensifying territorial disputes with neighbors and growing emphasis on protection of its national core

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<sup>6</sup> There are also debates regarding what is ‘assertiveness’ means. For example, Alastair Iain Johnston defines it as “a form of assertive diplomacy that explicitly threatens to impose costs on another actor that are clearly higher than before”, while Dingding and Xiaoyu argue that this definition is too narrow, and define it more broadly as “a confident and direct way to defend one country’s right or claims. For more details, see Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 7–48; Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu, and Alastair Iain Johnston, “Debating China’s Assertiveness,” *International Security* 40, no. 1 (2015): 120–56; Björn Jerdén, “The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How so Many Still Bought into It,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1 (2014): 47–88; Michael D Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” *China Leadership Monitor* 34, no. 22 (2011): 1–25.

interests, and military build-ups are generally pointed out as China's increased assertiveness and the changing aspect of its regional policy.

Some even go further to argue that the era of the 'peaceful development' is over, and Chinese diplomacy has entered a new phase with a new leadership since the year 2012<sup>7</sup>. For example, Michael Swaine, in his study of Chinese view and commentary on periphery policy, argue that China has increasingly utilized its economic, political, and even military power and selectively either reward or punish regional countries that support or oppose its core national interests<sup>8</sup>. Angela Poh and Mingjiang Li's study on the rhetoric of Chinese foreign policy also shows that China has "increasingly vocal in articulating its foreign and security interests in recent years"<sup>9</sup>. Some Chinese scholars also argue that it's the right time for China to discard or at least deviate from the existing strategy of keeping a low profile and move on to the strategy of FenFaYouWei (奋发有为, FFYW), meaning 'striving for achievement' in shaping a favorable environment for its national rejuvenation<sup>10</sup>.

A prominent Chinese scholar Jian Zhang defines the foreign policy

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<sup>7</sup> Angela Poh, and Mingjiang Li, "A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," *Asian Security* 13, no. 2 (2017): 84–97; Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2011): 54–67; Xuotong Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7–2 (2014): 153–184; Jian Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?" *Global Change, Peace and Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 5–19.

<sup>8</sup> Michael D, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," 25.

<sup>9</sup> Poh and Li, "A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," 84.

<sup>10</sup> Xuotong Yan, "From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 153-184.

development under the president Xi as ‘peaceful rise 2.0’. He claims that Chinese regional policy has entered a new phase in which it still adheres to its declared peaceful development, while showing more confident and proactive gestures in dealing with various regional affairs<sup>11</sup>. In his study of Chinese peripheral policy and historical shifts, Yunling Zhang says that China has adjusted its regional policy as a result of each shift, and argues that it is now passing through the third shift in its regional policy posture. In this shift, China views the region as an inseparable single region bound by shared interests, and also strategically indispensable in its rise to the global power<sup>12</sup>. Nien-chung Chang Liao’s work seeks to answer the main driver for the ‘new assertiveness’ of Chinese foreign policy by levels of analysis approach. He emphasizes individual-level factor over system-level and unit-level analysis, saying elite perceptions and individualistic attributes of Xi are the important factor in explaining more proactive diplomatic behaviors of China<sup>13</sup>.

On the other hand, Chinese official statement and some scholars have insisted that there have been no significant changes in China’s regional postures and policy. Understanding neighboring countries misgivings regarding China threat theory, Chinese government and officials repeatedly have affirmed its devotion toward the peaceful development and its official stance that it will not seek hegemony forever. Regionally, Chinese government insists so-called the ‘Good Neighborly (善邻友好)’

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<sup>11</sup> Zhang, “China’s New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards ‘Peaceful Rise 2.0’?,” 6.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang, “China and Its Neighbourhood: Transformation, Challenges and Grand Strategy,” 839

<sup>13</sup> Nien Chung Chang-Liao, “China’s New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping,” *Asian Security* 12, no. 2 (2016): 82–91.

policy under the principle of “Becoming Friends and Partners with Neighbors (与邻为善, 以邻为伴)” and Xi’s new concept of “Amity (親), Sincerity (誠), Mutual Benefit (惠), and Inclusiveness (容)”. Some eminent scholars also agree on the fact that its policy as well as diplomatic behavior did not substantially changed. For example, after analyzing seven significant events took place in 2010, Alastair Iain Johnston argued that there were no significant signs of fundamental shifts or actions that can be listed as the ‘new assertiveness’ of China except the controversial case of the South China Sea disputes<sup>14</sup>. In sum, Chinese diplomacy, in general, has not changed fundamentally.

Regardless of whether China truly changed its regional strategy and diplomatic behaviors in recent years or not, Chinese diplomacy has gradually become more and more complicated, consisted of both the aspects of ‘continuity’ and ‘change’ in its foreign policy. At the same time, given its increased power and influence, there is a strong need for other regional states to properly understand the changing aspects of the Chinese regional strategy and effectively respond to it for their future survival and prosperity. China’s foreign policy interests have considerably expanded and deepened in accordance with both internal and external situations. Not only fast changing dynamics and growing uncertainties in the region, but also more diversified and complicated process of the internal decision-making process within the Chinese domestic politics are making its foreign policy increasingly complex. In this sense, Chinese regional policy is still under the process of transition to better fit into a newly

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<sup>14</sup> Johnston, “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?,” 45.

developing regional order and changing international order. At the same time, it is also closely related with the survival of its neighboring Asian states as well as regional stability and prosperity, which provide one important motivation for this analysis to properly understand the dynamics of its unfolding regional policy.

In this context, this study is designed to conduct a comparative analysis between two recent Chinese regime- Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Xi Jinping (习近平)- in order to answer how has the Chinese Asian regional policy and diplomatic behavior changed under the new leadership, and what has been continued and changed over the time of power transition. As a theoretical approach for the analysis, this study will adopt the neo-classical realism's core assumptions and views. In contrast to popular neo-realists' view, neo-classical realists often argue that the structural variables solely can't fully describe the foreign policy of a country because the "systemic pressure must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level<sup>15</sup>". In sum, systemic factors are translated by internal factors, such as domestic politics, history, ideology and leadership characteristics, resulting in various forms of diplomatic behaviors and foreign policy<sup>16</sup>. Among a number of intervening variables to explain China's foreign policy, this paper mainly focus on the 'leadership perception' factor, which is

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<sup>15</sup> Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," (1998): 146.

<sup>16</sup> For more details about neo-classical realism view, refer to Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy," *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy* (2009): 1-41; Randall L. Schweller, "The progressive power of neoclassical realism," *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (2003): 311-47; Jennifer. Sterling-Folker, "Realist environment, liberal process, and domestic-level variables," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997): 1-25.

commonly considered as one significant factor, in the foreign-policy making process. Many neo-classical theorists stress the leadership perception as a critical factor in policy making process, especially in authoritarian political structure like China. In this sense, this research will attempt to see how the Chinese leadership's perception toward the Asian regional dynamics has been formed, and how this perception has been translated into the actual regional policy by conducting qualitative analysis.

Furthermore, this comparative study will adopt qualitative research methodology by conducting analytical literature review of authoritative resources and diplomatic behavior of China focusing on Hu and Xi's period. According to one academic definition, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them<sup>17</sup>". The authoritative resources here include not only the primary sources of official documents and interview/speeches given by Chinese leadership, but also authoritative secondary sources such as academic papers, major media coverages, and institute reports. Since the second term of president Xi is still on-going, the paper will mostly focus on timeline between ten years of Hu's period (2002-12), and the first term of Xi (2012-17) as the main target periods.

Based on neo-classical realist theoretical approach and qualitative research analysis, this paper suggests that Chinese Asian regional policy has been increasingly becoming more proactive and assertive, and will continue to move away from the

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<sup>17</sup> Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research," (2008): 3.

existing TGYH toward the FFYW policy. The new 5<sup>th</sup> generation of Chinese leaderships during Xi's first term implied the increased strategic importance of the Asian region and showed a more pro-activeness and assertiveness in its regional diplomatic postures. While adopting the long-held two-pronged policy of pursuing regional stability and safeguarding its core interests, regional policy direction under the Xi's leadership has been noticeably shifted toward putting emphasis on protecting its national core interests. In this sense, this research argues that there's reasonably high possibility that China will follow the path of rising powers in the past which struggled for more power and influence, challenging the current status-quo based on the core assumptions of neo-classical realism as well as its actual words and behaviors.

In this context, the outline of this paper consists of the following four chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter will briefly go over the historical overview of Chinese regional strategy and some of its guiding principles in Chinese diplomacy that are crucial for understanding the Chinese regional policy today as an extension of the past. Then, the third and fourth chapter, as a main body of the research, will conduct a comparative analysis of Chinese Asian regional policy between two recent Chinese regimes by analyzing leadership perceptions and actual diplomatic postures toward the region. After conducting an analysis, the fifth chapter will explain and assess the findings based on the analysis. Lastly, the concluding part will briefly summarize the overall contents and discuss the future prospects of how Chinese regional policy will likely be unfolded in the coming years.

## II. Chinese Foreign Policy and Asian Regional Policy

### 1. Historical Overview of Chinese Regional Strategy

Despite the fact that the Asian region has long been the China's strategic main theater to cultivate its national power capability and move forward, the development of Chinese regional strategy and policy is quite a recent invention. Understanding the historical context of how the Chinese regional strategy -or foreign policy in a broader sense- has been developed is very crucial element in properly understanding the Asian regional strategy today. This is because Chinese foreign policy has been advanced and modified based on the 'continuity' of the past strategic thinking as well as the present domestic and international factors. In this sense, this section will briefly discuss the Chinese foreign policy development from the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the era of Jiang Zemin (江泽民) until early 2000s.

To begin with, there was no systemic regional strategy and policy in Maoist era (1949-1976). According to Youngnam Cho, this is mainly because Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War period was evolved around two key features: great power diplomacy and strong ideological influence<sup>18</sup>. Firstly, after its establishment in 1949, the most important goal for Chinese diplomacy at the period was to ensure its survival in anarchic international setting. To ensure its security and survival, China during the Cold War period focused on great power relations, namely the relationship with the

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<sup>18</sup> 조영남. 「후진타오시대의중국정치」 (서울:나남출판, 2006), 268-270.

two great powers, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Not only the Cold War antagonistic relationship between China and the United States, but also the internal split between China and Soviet Union during 1960s made PRC isolated and resulted in difficulties in formulating its own independent diplomatic path. In this sense, there was a very limited strategic space for China to shape the relationships with other regional countries or Third-world countries during the Cold War period. Therefore, the Chinese peripheral policy in this period was often “reactive and defensive”, determined largely by external factors<sup>19</sup>. It had uneasy and poor relations with most of its regional states from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Moreover, the foreign policy in Maoist period was largely guided by communist ideology. At the time, Mao Zedong (毛泽东), the founder and first president of the PRC, exerted almost omnipotent personal power and charismatic influence over the country’s path and government policy. Hence, his view and interpretation on domestic development and international environment was a critical factor in deciding overall Chinese foreign policy. According to his view, the international trend at the time could be summarized as ‘war and revolution (战争与革命)’, and such revolutionary ideology-driven orientation was the primary determinant of the foreign policy of China during 1949-76. Mao emphasized forming a united front against Western imperialism and capitalism, the principal enemy of the people of the world, and carrying out revolution to free people against those enemies. Mao saw the

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<sup>19</sup> Zhang, “China and its Neighbourhood: Transformation, Challenges and Grand Strategy,” 836.

world based on his theory of “inevitable war (战争不可避免)” and “incessant revolution (不断革命论)”, and guided its foreign policy to prepare for international revolution by assisting Third-world countries. The participation in Korean War under the slogan of “Resist America and Aid Korea” in 1950 and Vietnam War in mid-1960s is one typical example of the campaigns. This ideology-oriented Chinese foreign policy even made it difficult for China to break from reactive and defensive foreign policy to develop more systematic and consistent regional strategy.

However, Chinese regional strategy began to witness significant changes following the Deng’s adoption of the ‘reform and opening up policy (改革开放)’ in late 1970s. After the decision of the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee to adopt the socialist modernization policy in 1978, China opened its door to the international society. By then general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Deng Xiaoping discarded pre-existed Mao’s revolutionary and ideology-oriented diplomatic path and began to adopt more realistic and pragmatic approaches in its foreign policy in order to facilitate and maximize its economic development interests.

In 1984, Deng officially announced that the theme of the time was being replaced by “peace and development (和平与发展)” from the previous Mao’s judgement of the “war and revolution”. Deng claimed that the international society was witnessing more peaceful and stable international environment where there was much less likelihood of major conflicts and wars. Based on this new perception, Chinese foreign affairs and relations with its neighbors have substantially changed compared to

the previous regime. The first priority of the country became the economic development to restore the anguished nation, and its foreign policy goal was adjusted to support this significant diplomatic objective. Since then, the first priority and objective of its regional strategy, which persisted until today, has been adjusted to ensure and shape the external environment conducive to its economic development. This stance of the overall Chinese foreign policy can be well summarized within the Deng's famous TGYH principle, which clearly reflects its intent to focus more on domestic governance and national development than external international affairs.

With the fundamental shift in Chinese foreign policy since late 1970s, its regional strategy started to take form during 1980s. To ensure and shape stable external environment to concentrate its power and resources in economic development, Chinese government attempted to settle existing territorial conflicts with its neighboring states. Sharing fourteen land borders and five maritime borders with neighboring states, China at the time had faced with a number of border disputes with regional states. For example, China had a territorial dispute with India in 1962, with Soviet Union in 1969, and with Vietnam in 1979 respectively. However, in the quest for securing a stable international environment, Beijing changed its strategic stance and took a series of measures to improve relations with its neighbors<sup>20</sup>. As a result, China, since 1980s, has significantly recovered its relations with neighboring states through 'consultations and negotiations', including Soviet Union and India. However, on the other hand, Chinese

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<sup>20</sup> Yunling, Zhang, ed, *China-South Asian Relations: Making New Partnership: a Rising China and Its Neighbors* (Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008).

regional strategy had not yet formed its independent and systematic shape in Chinese diplomacy. It became largely pragmatic and organized compared to the past, but still limited and isolated in many ways.

During 1990s, Chinese peripheral policy finally started to take a shape in a more systematic way. A chain of significant events from late 1980s to 1990s, mainly the 1989' Tian'anmen (天安门) incident and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, brought about another fundamental shift in the international system and thus having tremendous impacts on existing Chinese diplomacy. Especially after the Tiananmen incident, China had become isolated in international society not only with the growing concerns regarding its rise, but also with the US-led containment policy toward China. In this context, there was a strong need for China to accommodate to the fast-changing international environment and adjust its foreign policy. To this end, by then president of China, Jiang Zemin substantially expanded its scope of foreign policy from the great power diplomacy to more proactive and omni-directional diplomacy, including both peripheral and multilateral diplomacy in Asia region. Apart from its traditional focus on major power diplomacy, Chinese foreign policy had become more systematic and organized, which could be categorized as the following three pillars: i) traditional great power diplomacy, ii) peripheral diplomacy, and iii) international-regional multilateralism.

By late 1990s, China normalized relations with most of its neighbors, demonstrating effectiveness in its regional strategies. Some examples are successful

negotiation with Russia and Vietnam regarding the demarcation of land borders as well as India in maintaining stability in the disputed areas near the border line<sup>21</sup>. China had developed several principles for building amicable relationships not only with major powers but also with neighboring states, striving for survival and co-existence. From the security perspective, this was mainly to shape the favorable and stable external environment as well as to prevent isolation from the international society amid the US's attempt to contain China. From the economic- political perspective, this was not only to strengthen economic ties and strategic partnerships to continue its economic growth, but also to expand both its regional and global influences.

Moreover, since late 1990s, China has begun to more actively participate in both regional and global multilateral institutions and initiatives although the process has been gradual and somewhat limited in terms of scope and degree<sup>22</sup>. From the late 1990s, China has successfully incorporated into US-led liberal order, thereby rapidly achieving economic and military growth. China's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) was one symbol of showing its rise. With its rapid growth in economy and military capabilities, Beijing under the leadership of Jiang showed more proactive gestures toward building and participating in regional and global multilateralism, gradually perceiving itself as the great power in the region.

One of the key diplomatic concepts in Jiang's era was the "Responsible Great

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<sup>21</sup> Wenwen Shen, "China and its Neighbors: Troubled Relations," EU-Asia Centre (2012), [http://www.euasiacentre.eu/pub\\_details.php?pub\\_id=46](http://www.euasiacentre.eu/pub_details.php?pub_id=46)

<sup>22</sup> Zhang, and Tang 2005. *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, 50.

Power (責任大國)”, meaning China should take more responsibilities in international and regional affairs along with its increased comprehensive power. According to one Chinese official<sup>23</sup>, the 1997-98 Asian currency crisis was one prominent example that showed a more responsible China. He pointed out that the Chinese government’s decision not to devalue its currency, and offer aids packages and low-interest loans to several Southeast Asian countries significantly contributed to resolving critical regional problem. In fact, these good gestures and assistance not only were appreciated in the region but also boosted the confidence of Chinese leaders in their role as regional actors<sup>24</sup>. However, while gradually shouldering more responsibilities, it has also been somewhat limited because China was highly selective in choosing the sorts of responsibilities it is willing to accept.

Last but not least, this was the period when the guiding principle of Chinese regional policy slowly but gradually moved to the elementary level of the “YouSuoZuoWei (有搜作为, YSZW)”, normally translated as “get something accomplished”, from the TGYH approach. However, this didn’t mean that the TGYH policy was passing over. It still functioned as the first guiding principle of Chinese diplomacy, while more proactive and assertive diplomatic gestures were increasingly detected with its growth in power and influence. Not only the new diplomatic concepts and ideas developed during the Jiang’s period such as “New Security Concept (新安全

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<sup>23</sup>唐家璇, “中國跨世紀外交的光輝歷程,” 2002, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/36007.html> (assessed April 10, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> David Shambaugh, "China engages Asia: reshaping the regional order." *International security* 29, no. 3 (2005): 68

观点)”, but also the creation of the self-centered regional initiatives like the Boao Asia Forum (BAF) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) all reflected its growing confidence and intent to actively shape the region favorable for its national domestic growth. However, in Jiang period, China’s YSZW approach was still limited both in scope and degree largely due to the US-led containment policy as well as the limited national capacity.

In sum, Chinese Asian regional strategy and policy started to formulate since 1980s, and more systemically organized and regulated under the official name “peripheral diplomacy (周边政策)”. Perceiving overall international environments as favorable for its national development, which can be summarized as Deng’s thesis of the “Peace and Development”, Chinese regional policy has been developed with two main objectives. First, it has aimed to ensure and shape the surrounding environments conducive to continuing its economic development, which has lasted until today. Second, through actively participating in regional·global multilateral platforms and initiatives as well as gradually taking responsibilities in international affairs, China has pursued to counter US’s containment policy and enhance its global clouts gradually. In the meantime, however, Chinese regional policy has increasingly facing more complex challenges such as on-going territorial and maritime disputes, rivalry with other regional powers, “China threat” to weaker neighbors, and relations with the United

States<sup>25</sup>.

## 2. Guiding Principles of Chinese Diplomacy

With the success of the opening door policy and the rise of its comprehensive power, Chinese foreign policy has been developed through the consistent interaction between the changes in international power structure as well as the growth of China's overall national power. Corresponding to these fundamental changes in both domestic and international factors, China during the reform era has begun to build up several diplomatic principles and foreign affair concepts in its diplomacy. According to some prominent scholarly works, some important guiding principles of Chinese diplomacy can be summarized into the following five principles.

The first principle of the overall Chinese foreign policy is the principle of "Independence and Self-reliance". Although this principle has been emphasized since the establishment of the PRC, it was officially confirmed in 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China. In the opening speech, Deng said that "China's affairs should be run according to China's specific conditions and by the Chinese people themselves. Independence and self-reliance have always been and will always be their basic stand"<sup>26</sup>. The fifth session of the fifth National People's Congress (NPC) inserted this principle in Chinese Constitution saying "China adheres to independent foreign

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<sup>25</sup> Suisheng Zhao. "China's Periphery Policy and Asian Neighbors," *Security Dialogue* 30, no. 3 (1999): 335–46.

<sup>26</sup> Xiaoping Deng, *Selected works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. 3* (Beijing: People's Publishing House 35, 1993).

policy”. In the meantime, China’s independent and self-reliant diplomatic path since 1980s represents its increasing confidence in its national power and its own distinctive diplomatic path with Chinese characteristics.

The second guiding principle is so-called “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, suggested by the former Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来) at Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. These five principles include “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence<sup>27</sup>”. Also known as Panchsheel Treaty, the five principles were first officially declared in the preface of the “Agreement between the People’s Republic of China and Republic of India on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India”, which was signed on 28 April 1954. Since its new shift in neighboring policy in 1980s, the five principles has begun to be re-examined and emphasized as one of the important guiding principles in China’s foreign policy.

Related to the first two principles, the Anti-imperialism and Anti-hegemonism principle has been consistently emphasized in Chinese foreign diplomacy. The constitution of China in 1982 explicitly stipulated that “China consistently opposes imperialism, hegemonism, and colonialism, works to strengthen unity with the people of other countries, supports the oppressed nations and the developing countries in their

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<sup>27</sup> People's Republic of China, “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,” The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2014, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node\\_2825.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm) (accessed May 10, 2020).

just struggle to win and preserve national independence and develop their national economies”<sup>28</sup>. Having a painful memory of Opium War in 1839, China has been consistently and strongly criticized the hegemonism by the great powers. Firmly opposing to the US-led unilateralism and hegemonism, China today is claiming more democratized and equitable international order in solidarity with Third-world and other developing countries.

Fourthly, the principle of the “Self-restraint” has been one of the most important principles in Chinese foreign policy development. Also embodied in Deng’s famous dictum TGYH and “BuYaoDangTou (不要当头, BYDT)”, the core of the principle has passivity and defensiveness in regional and global affairs strategically in order to concentrate in its domestic development and governance. In his numerous speeches during 1990- 92, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly warned against “seeking leadership in global or regional affairs and shouldering responsibilities that China can’t bear”<sup>29</sup>. However, this principle has begun to weaken since mid-1990s when China started to make earnest efforts to engage in international community.

The last principle is closely related to China’s relation with Taiwan (台湾), the “One China” policy. This long-held principle in Chinese diplomacy declares that there’s no other sovereign state or government under the name of China as opposed to

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<sup>28</sup> People's Republic of China, “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,” The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2014, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node\\_2825.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm) (accessed May 11, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Zhang, and Tang 2005. *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, 49.

the on-going separatist movements in places like Xinjiang (新疆), Tibet (西藏), Taiwan, and Hongkong (香港). For example, it has been one of the uncompromisable national core interests (核心利益) of Chinese diplomacy that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China to be reunified in the near future<sup>30</sup>. This principle has been applied whenever it establishes diplomatic relations with third countries without exception. Also, this principle is meaningful that it has been the importance basis of a Chinese unification policy based on Deng’s “one country, two systems (一国两制).”

### ***Guiding Principles of Chinese Diplomacy***

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- 1. Self-reliance and Independence**

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  - 2. Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**

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  - 3. Anti-hegemonism/ Anti-imperialism**

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  - 4. Self-restraint**

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  - 5. One China Policy**

[Table 1. Guiding Principles of Chinese Diplomacy]

In sum, the development of Chinese diplomacy and foreign policy has been formulated and adjusted under the aforementioned five guiding principles- “Independent and Self-reliant”, “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence”, “Anti-imperialism and Anti-hegemonism”, “Self-restraint”, and “One China”. These leading

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<sup>30</sup> Karishma Vaswani, “What Is the ‘One China’ Policy?,” *BBC*, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-38285354> (accessed April 24, 2020).

principles have mostly continued throughout the reform era until today's formation of Chinese foreign policy under the new leadership. Accordingly, these principles have exerted tremendous and fundamental impacts on the establishment and adjustment of its regional strategy and policy.

### **III. China's Asian Regional Policy in the Hu Jintao Era**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of Chinese Communist Party in November 2002 officially declared the new era of the Chinese 4<sup>th</sup> generation leadership, represented by the new General Secretary Hu Jintao (胡锦涛). Compared to previous regime of Jiang, both internal and external environment were relatively much more favorable for the new leadership. The miraculous pace of its economic development not only significantly enhanced the quality of life for ordinary Chinese people, thus strengthening the rule legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, but also allowed the country to increasingly expand its power and influence abroad. Meanwhile, Asian region, rapidly becoming the center of world politics and economy after Europe, had been traditionally important strategic theater and stepping stone for China to achieve its goal of becoming the global great power exerting power and influence globally beyond the region, and of great rejuvenation of Chinese nation. Against this background, this chapter will examine how Chinese Asian regional policy during Hu's period unfolded based on the leadership perception during the time. More specifically, this chapter will include the following three sub-categories to analyze how the leadership perception is being translated into actual diplomatic practices in the Asian region- i) perception of international situation, ii) challenges and objectives, and iii) and lastly regional postures and practices.

## 1. Perception of International Situation

As mentioned above, the perception of Chinese political elites toward the international situation is one of the critical factors in formulating its overall foreign strategy and policy. In many cases, Chinese foreign policy has been decisively developed by the Chinese leaders' view on both internal and external environment, especially during Mao's and Deng's period. In this context, this section will explore the new 4<sup>th</sup> generation leadership's perspectives toward the external environment. In sum, Hu's view was not substantially different from his predecessor Jiang's. Throughout his regime, the new leader continued to claim repeatedly that the dominant theme of the time is the "peace" and "development", subsidiarily adding the new term "cooperation" beside<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, several official documents mentioned about the global trend toward multi-polarization and economic globalization in the period of new transition in international relations.

At the turn of the new century, the new Chinese leaderships defined the first two decades of the century as the "period of strategic opportunities<sup>32</sup>" to accomplish the rejuvenation of great Chinese nation with the specific aim of achieving the

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<sup>31</sup> Jintao Hu, "Hu Jintao's Report at 17th Party Congress," 中国网, 2007, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm> (accessed Mar 15, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> In fact, the term was first introduced by Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin in 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of CCP in 2002. During his report, Jiang said "An overview of the situation shows that for our country, the first two decades of the 21st century are a period of important strategic opportunities, which we must seize tightly and which offers bright prospects". For more details, refer to Zemin Jiang, "Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress on Nov 8, 2002," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/3698\\_665962/t18872.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18872.shtml) (accessed Mar 12, 2020).

“moderately prosperous society in all-round (全面的小康社会)<sup>33</sup>”. Continued to succeed Deng’s view of international situation in late 1970s, the new Chinese leaders perceive the “peace” and “development” as the dominant theme of the time. The official documents and authoritative speeches by Chinese leaders repeatedly shared and confirmed this view.

*“Since the policies of reform and opening-up were introduced, China, keeping in view the changes in the international situation, has upheld the important strategic judgment that peace and development are the theme of the present times, and declared on many occasions that China did not seek hegemony in the past, nor does it now, and will not do so in the future when it gets stronger”*

*-Chinese Peaceful Development Road, 2005*

*“Peace and development of the new century remain the principal themes of the times, and the pursuit of peace development and cooperation has become an irresistible trend of the times”*

*-Nation Defense White Paper, 2008*

*“Peace and development remain the main themes of the present era, and pursuit of*

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<sup>33</sup> The so-called “three-step strategy was suggested by Deng, and implemented in the 1980 for achieving modernization during the reform era. According to official explanation, “the first step was to double GNP of 1980 and ensure people’s basic living needs. The second step was to redouble the output of 1980 and achieve initial prosperity by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The third step aims to make the per capita GNP reach the level of that of the medium-developed countries, bring about general prosperity, basically realize modernization and build China into a rich, strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and modern socialist country by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People’s Republic of China in the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. The central goal of this three-step development strategy is to improve people’s material and cultural lives, and make the people rich and the country strong.”, cited from State Council of China, “White Papers of Governments,” Information Office of the State Council of the Peoples’ Republic of China, Accessed May 25, 2020, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/> (accessed Mar 15, 2020).

*peace, development and cooperation has become an irresistible trend of the times”*

*-17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report, 2007*

*“Peace, cooperation and development represent the main theme of our times.”*

*-Hu’s Speech at UN Summit, 2005*

Likewise, China has repeatedly emphasized its view of international situation with the two core terms, ‘peace’ and ‘development’. According to official explanation, “peace is the foundation for development while development is fundamental for peace”<sup>34</sup>. In other words, Chinese political elites during Hu’s era viewed that the international situation and the surrounding environment would be favorable now and for coming next few decades during which China could concentrate on its modernization program and increase its overall comprehensive national power. In short, it’s a golden time for its great leap. However, this didn’t mean that the world was completely stable and peaceful. Several official documents also stated about the destabilizing factors and increasingly complex security threats, which could hamper its national growth.

*“The international community is increasingly facing comprehensive, diverse, and complex security threats. The world is not yet peaceful. Political, economic, and security problems and geographical, ethnic and religious contradictions are interconnected and complex. Hegemonism and power politics remain key factors*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, “China’s Peaceful Development Road (2005)”.

*undermining international security. Non-traditional security threats present greater danger, and local turmoil caused by war is on and off ... .. “*

*-National Defense White Paper, 2006*

In sum, although uncertainties and destabilizing factors are continually emerging with new challenges and complex threats, the dominant view of Chinese leaders on the external environment and international situation was overall external conditions are stable and favorable for them to strive for modernization of their country.

Meanwhile, Chinese leaders were also keenly aware of profound structural changes occurring in the world politics arena. Two keywords here were the “multi-polarization (多极化)” and “economic globalization (世界化)”. After the fall of the Soviet Union in early 1990s, Chinese scholars and elites came to realize that the Cold War and bipolar system had come to end and the world had entered a new period of the transition towards multi-polarization. According to official explanation, “The emerging economies, regional groups and Asiana and other regions are becoming stronger, and various non-state actors are growing fast, which, taking advantage of economic globalization and the information age, expand their influence and have become an important force in various countries and in the international arena<sup>35</sup>”. Against what so-called the *hegemonic stability theory (HST)*, Chinese leaders support a more equitable and democratized international order, which is beneficial for their own national interests. However, China didn’t officially adopt the multi-polarization policy despite

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, “China’s Peaceful Development (2011)”.

its support toward the trend. In this sense, one prominent scholar argued that “Beijing’s perception of a multipolar system is a matter of normative truth rather than an empirical or analytical assessment<sup>36</sup>”.

At the same time, Chinese leaders and official statements repeatedly mentioned about the deepening trend of the economic globalization. The progresses in industrialization and informationization throughout the globe had led to “increase in economic interdependence, interconnectivity and interactivity among countries.” And this trend turned “the world into a community of common destiny in which the members are closely interconnected<sup>37</sup>”. The deepening economic globalization has gradually spilled into other realms such as politics, security, and society. After experiencing global economy’s impact on politics in watershed events both regional and global financial crisis in 1997-98 and 2008-09 respectively, Chinese leaders started to aware the critical impact of growing economic interdependency on the world politics, and went further to agree that the globalization should be managed properly with consistent and flexible strategies<sup>38</sup>.

In sum, the perception of the international situation, the diagnosis of Chinese political leaders during the Hu’s period was not fundamentally different from the previous regime. Still, they emphasized the Deng’s view “peace and development” as

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<sup>36</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Beijing's perception of the international system and foreign policy adjustment in the post-cold war world," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 3 (1992): 71.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, “National Defense White Paper (2008)”.

<sup>38</sup> Deng Yong and Fei-Ling Wang, eds. *In the Eye of the Dragon: China Views the World*. (Lanham: Bowman & Littlefield, 1999): 118-120.

the main theme of the time and interpreted the global environment based on the perception. This, in fact, also indicated that the overall foreign policy, which are often developed based on the perception of the leaders, did not fundamentally change from the past.

## 2. Challenges and Objectives

From the late 1980s, the strategic importance of the Asia region had been increasingly stressed as China started to perceive the region as indispensable for its path of socialist modernization program. Not only the historical lessons from the world history which provided the importance of regional space when the rising power had built up its power, but also from its own experiences such as 1989 Tian'anmen incident and 1997 Asian financial crisis provided Chinese leaders with the recognition that the region is very critical stepping stone to its rise. After the Tian'anmen massacre in 1989, China was largely isolated by the Western powers, and China's rapid national growth started to make its neighboring countries worrying about its possible hegemonic ambition during 1990s. What so-called the "China threat theory" was widespread among the regional states. So, by the time Hu came to power in 2002, China was "one of the loneliest rising power in world history"<sup>39</sup>, conflicting with both the Western powers and regional states.

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<sup>39</sup> John Lee, "Lonely Power, Staying Power: The Rise of China and the Resilience of US Pre-eminence". *Strategic Snapshots* 10 (2011): 1.

Moreover, Hu's 4<sup>th</sup> generation leadership faced a number of domestic challenges which exerted considerable impacts on the formulation of its foreign policy. China's rapid development for the past decades resulted in creating various social problems such as income inequality, rampant corruption, environmental pollution, poor healthcare and social services, etc. Also, Chinese people's expectations toward government performances had significantly been raised. Facing increasing challenges at home along with rising public demands, the Hu and 4<sup>th</sup> generation leaders well understood that their rule legitimacy and regime survival were highly hinged on their capacity to cope with various social demands from its society<sup>40</sup>. Among many challenges, probably the most important and fundamental task was the economic performance of the country. Continuing economic development was the necessary condition to meet the society's demand, although not sufficient. In this sense, the main focus of the Chinese foreign policy was to create and shape the stable and peaceful external environment conducive to its domestic development.

On the other hand, there was a growing confidence shared by Chinese leaders with China's increased international status and role in the international society. Throughout the past few decades, they witnessed the deepening interdependence and complexity in the Asian region, and growing confidence shared among Chinese leaders and scholars about its role in international affairs. When both regional and global financial crisis occurred respectively in 1997 and 2008, Chinese political elites became

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<sup>40</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Hu Jintao's Foreign Policy Legacy," *E-International Relations Publishing* 8 (2012): 3.

well aware of not only the growing interdependence in terms of economic and politics, but also its expanded international status and role, particularly in the region. Especially, the year 2008, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of reform and opening-up policy, was the symbolic and extraordinary year for China to boast its enhanced power and influence all over the world. The post-2008 global financial crisis China found itself as one of the main linchpins of the global economy compared to shaky American and Western markets. Moreover, the successful 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, especially its opening ceremony, surprised the world with its enormous scale as well as its distinctive culture and traditions.

*“The year 2008 was an extraordinary one in the history of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In that year China overcame a devastating earthquake, with the epicenter in Wenchuan County, Sichuan Province; successfully hosted the 29<sup>th</sup> Beijing Olympic Games and Paralympics in Beijing”*

*-National Defense White Paper, 2008*

Likewise, launched with both frustration and confidence, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation leaders Hu and Wen Jianbao (温家宝) utilized not only the legacies from the past regimes, but also new ideas and concepts to cope with their own environment and situation. However, as the historical overview of its regional policy and prominent scholarly works in this field indicates, it will be reasonable and safe to say that the Chinese regional policy in Hu’s period was not fundamentally different from the past regimes, which includes the following three main objectives: i) to shape and maintain

peripheral environment conducive to China's concentrating on its comprehensive national development, ii) to effectively respond to US-led China containment policy and wide-spread China threat theory, and gradually expand its influence based on the enormous material growth, iii) and lastly to accomplish its goal of rejuvenation of great Chinese nations and become global great power using the Asian region as an important leverage.

### 3. Regional Postures and Practices

In this section, this research paper will explore some key features of the Chinese actual practices in relation to its regional strategy. Four sub-categories, which aimed for the aforementioned three objectives, are included in this section for the purpose of the analysis – i) *good neighborly diplomacy*, ii) *economic diplomacy*, iii) *multilateral diplomacy*, and iv) *soft power diplomacy*. Although these categories are not exclusive to one another and often closely inter-connected to achieve its ultimate goal of the foreign policy grand strategy, this section divides them into four parts for the analytical purpose.

#### *a. Good Neighborly Diplomacy*

Since 1989 when the Chinese government first officially declared that it will

“grounded firmly on Asian Pacific, stabilizing periphery (立足亞太 穩定周边),” China had put enormous efforts to develop the good neighborly diplomacy with its neighboring countries. In the 1992 Government Report (政府工作報告), it reaffirmed that building a good-neighborly relationship and partnership was one important aspect of Chinese foreign policy. China had increasingly stressed the importance of the regional policy. In 2002, China set a new diplomatic approach, saying “big powers are the key; neighbors are paramount; developing countries are the foundation; and multilateralism is an important stage.”

During Hu’s period, this concept even took a concrete form, which aimed for “building an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighborhood (睦邻，安临，富邻)” under the principle of “becoming friends and partners with neighbors (与邻为善，以邻为伴)”. This good neighborly regional policy was implemented mainly to shape the stable peripheral environment and effectively respond to the US-led China containment policy. This good neighborly diplomacy can be broadly divided into two main parts – the resolution of territorial disputes and the strategic partnership build-up.

*“For our neighboring countries, we will continue to follow the foreign policy of friendship and partnership, strengthen good-neighborly relations and practical cooperation with them, and energetically engage in regional cooperation in order to jointly create a peaceful, stable regional environment featuring equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation.”*

*-Hu’s Report at 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, 2007*

First, China had made efforts to resolve existing territorial disputes with peripheral countries, which could pose imminent threats and hamper its national development since late 1980s. China has more neighbors than any country except the Russian Federation, with fourteen states on its land borders and five states on its maritime boundaries. As mentioned earlier, during 1990s, Jiang made a strident step toward resolving numerous territorial disputes and successfully concluded several agreements with the counterparts to resolve territorial disputes. Hu succeeded his predecessor's approach in normalizing relations with all its neighbors. Some typical examples of resolving land border disputes were China's settlement with Russia and Vietnam. In 2004, China and Russia settled the last part of their old border conflicts, signing an agreement fixing their 4,300 kilometer-long border<sup>41</sup>. In 2009, China and Vietnam also concluded the demarcation of land border after thirty years of bloody border war. They first settled a land border agreement in 1999, but it took additional nine more years to finally settle the 1,350 kilometer frontier between two countries<sup>42</sup>. Also China and 10 ASEAN countries signed the "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DCPSC)" in 2002 to "resolve their territorial and jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat of use of force, though

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<sup>41</sup> NYT Reporter. "Putin and Hu Resolve Border Disputes." *The New York Times*, 2004. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/15/world/asia/putin-and-hu-resolve-border-disputes.html> (assessed April 12, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> NYT Reporter. "China and Vietnam Settle Border Dispute." *The New York Times*, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/01/world/asia/01iht-border.1.19027004.html> (assessed April 12, 2020).

friendly consultations and negotiations by sovereign states directly concerned”<sup>43</sup>.

Second, Hu also continued Jiang’s policy of building strategic bilateral partnerships with its neighbors. The concept ‘partnership’ first emerged after the end of the Cold war period in China. After the adoption of a non-alliance strategy since the 12th party congress in 1982, China utilized various kinds of strategic partnership in bilateral relationships with other countries. According to one study, in contrast to alliance formation, bilateral strategic partnerships were not driven by shared domestic ideologies or political system, thereby bridging ideological differences and enabling the cooperation for national interests of countries regardless of their ideologies and values<sup>44</sup>. In this regard, China in the reform era established these strategic partnerships with many Asian countries to effectively counter US-led alliances and expand its regional influence. During his term in 2000s, Hu made several bilateral strategic partnerships with its neighboring countries. Among East Asian countries, China established *strategic partnership* with Indonesia (2005) and Cambodia (2010), *comprehensive partnerships* with South Korea (2003), *comprehensive strategic partnership* with Vietnam (2008) and Laos (2009). Also in 2003 China elevated the partnership with ASEAN from *partnership facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on good neighborliness and mutual trust* (1997) to *strategic partnership for peace and*

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<sup>43</sup> Karishma Vaswani, “Explained: South China Sea Dispute,” *South China Morning Post*, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/2186449/explained-south-china-sea-dispute> (assessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Georg Strüver, "China's Partnership Diplomacy: International Alignment Based on Interests or Ideology," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 1 (2017): 31-65.

prosperity.

<b>Partnership<sup>o</sup></b>	<b>Priorities<sup>o</sup></b>
<i>Comprehensive Strategic Partnership<sup>o</sup></i>	Full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs <sup>o</sup>
<i>Strategic Partnership<sup>o</sup></i>	Coordinate more closely on regional and international affairs, including military <sup>o</sup>
<i>Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership<sup>o</sup></i>	Maintain sound momentum of high-level exchanges, enhanced contacts at various levels, and increased mutual understanding on issues of common interest <sup>o</sup>
<i>Cooperative Partnership<sup>o</sup></i>	Develop cooperation on bilateral issues, based on mutual respect and benefit <sup>o</sup>
<i>Friendly Cooperative Partnership<sup>o</sup></i>	Strengthen cooperation on bilateral issues such as trade <sup>o</sup>

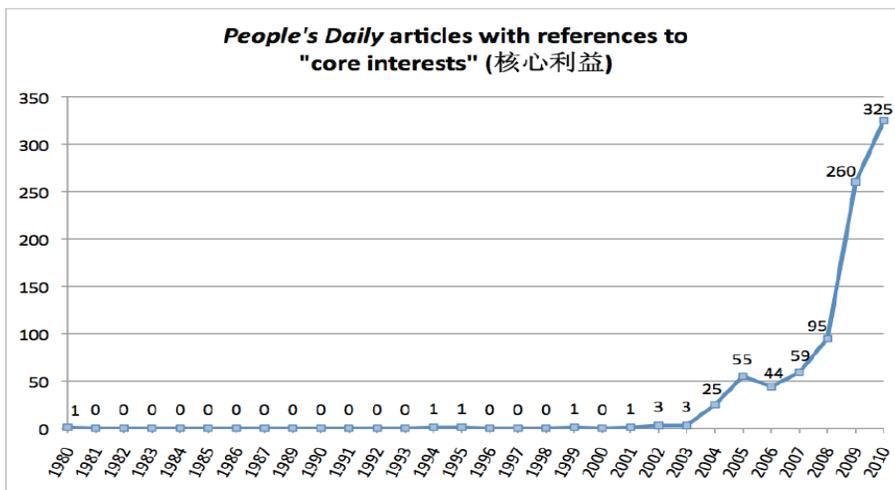
[Table 2. Level of Chinese Strategic Partnership<sup>45</sup>]

On the other hand, however, Chinese leadership under Hu started to emphasize the notion “core interests<sup>46</sup> (核心利益)”. Since around late 2009, when the term was inserted in the US-China Joint Statement between Hu and Barack Obama, the notion has received immense attention from the both media and scholars. Many observers and experts in this field often argued that Chinese foreign policy became more assertive and aggressive, and claimed more frequent and emphasis on the term as the evidence of its growing assertiveness in foreign affairs. According to one

<sup>45</sup> SCMP Reporter. “Quick Guide to China’s Diplomatic Levels.” *South China Morning Post*, 2016. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1903455/quick-guide-chinas-diplomatic-levels> (assessed April 10, 2020)..

<sup>46</sup> Chinese White Paper on “China’s Peaceful Development (2011)” first stipulated that core interests include “State sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China’s political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development.

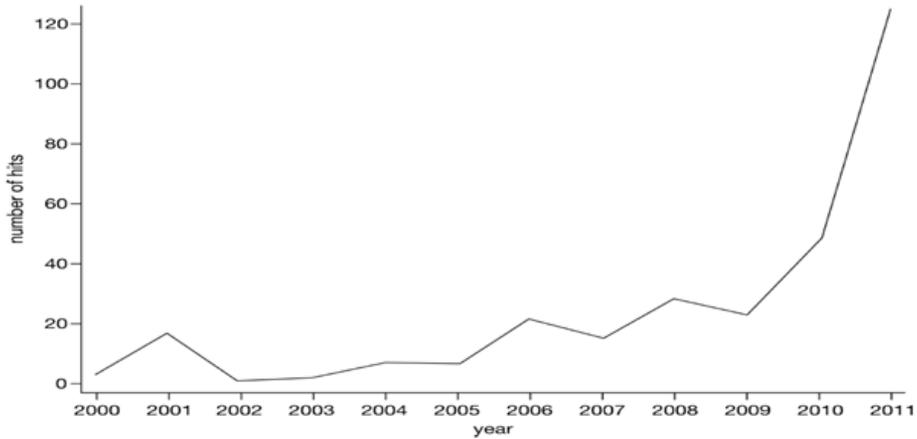
prominent scholar’s observation, there are three main reasons for this claim<sup>47</sup>. First, compared to the past, this newly developed concept had been more frequently appeared and formally included in various official statements and documents compared to the past. Second, the concept implies that it is nonnegotiable in nature, reflecting an increased level of rigidity toward the ongoing related issues. Lastly, the ‘core interest’ concept is rather ambiguous and allegedly expanding in terms of scope and content. For example, some scholars point out that China is seemingly seeking to include East and South China Sea as its core interests.



[Figure 1. People’s Daily articles with references to “core interests”<sup>48</sup>]

<sup>47</sup> Michael D. “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” 2.

<sup>48</sup> Michael D. “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” 4.



SOURCE: Google Scholar.

[Figure 2. Frequency of Academic books and articles referring to “Assertive China”<sup>49</sup>]

*b. Economic Diplomacy*

It was the Hu Jintao’s period when the term ‘economic diplomacy’ started officially appeared. After the 16<sup>th</sup> party congress, when Jiang officially announced what so-called the “Go Global (走出去)” strategy to encourage domestic firms overseas expansion, the concept “economic diplomacy” started to appear and reaffirmed in its official statement and documents<sup>50</sup>. With deepening economic globalization and interdependence in the post-Cold war period, the geo-economic aspect has been more stressed than geo-political factors in international relations, exerting tremendous impact on the country’s national security and politics. In this regard, economic diplomacy has become an important part of Chinese regional policy toward Asia.

<sup>49</sup> Johnston, “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?,” 12.

<sup>50</sup> 권혁재, and 최지영, "시진핑 체제 중국 경제외교의 발전과 특징," *현대중국연구* 16, no. 2 (2015): 81-124.

China has strategically utilized its massive economic capability and influence not only to dispel existing misgivings toward its rise among its neighbors, but also to gradually expand its influence in the Asian region.

Since 1978, China gradually accelerated its reform and opening door policy, engaging into global economy rapidly. China joined WTO in 2001 and established many Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) all over the world. In the same context, in 2004, Hu proposed to propel the “opening up” of its economy by combining both the traditional “Bringing In (引进来)” approach with the new concept “Go Global (走出去)” strategy. Combined with traditional strategy of passively promoting foreign investment into the country, now China became more proactive to encourage its domestic companies to go out, thereby enhancing its global competitiveness and maximizing its national interest.

Particularly, China’s engagement and influence in Asian region is most evident in the economic spheres. As rising economic power, the expansion of economic ties between China and neighboring states provided China with more policy options for its regional diplomacy. China is the biggest trading partner of numerous Asian countries as well as the largest source of trade surplus. Moreover, as one of the largest investors in the world, China has been rapidly becoming the engine of economic growth. According to Chinese Institute of International Studies, China’s investment in neighboring countries, including East Asia countries, amounted to \$9.188 billion

dollars occupying 28.9% of the total foreign investment (31.74 billion)<sup>51</sup>. Not only that, China during Hu's period established a number of FTAs<sup>52</sup> and actively participated in regional economic multilateralism to enhance its influences within the region. For example, it concluded several FTAs with Thailand in 2003, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2004, Singapore in 2008. Furthermore, China during Hu's era also become enthusiastic proponent of the economic multilateralism with many Asian countries, actively participating in regional institutions such as Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1991, ASEAN+1, and ASEAN+ 3 (ASEAN countries with China, Japan, and South Korea.

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<sup>51</sup> Guoyou Song, "Building Friendly Nearby: China's Economic Relations with Neighboring Countries," *China Institute of International Studies* (2013)

<sup>52</sup> Free Trade Agreement in East Asia were pioneered by the ASEAN in 1992 when it initiated the ASEAN FTA (AFTA), and encouraged by ASEAN+1 (ASEAN+ China). Since then more and more countries in East Asia has involved in FTAs, although the characteristics of these FTAs differ depending on their background and circumstances,; For more details, Yunling Zhang, and Minghui Shen. "The Status of East Asian Free Trade Agreements," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2012.

	Japan	Rep. of Korea	PRC	ASEAN	India	Australia	New Zealand
Japan		⊙		☑	⊙	⊙	⊙
Rep. of Korea	⊙		⊙	☑	☑	⊙	⊙
PRC		⊙		☑	⊙	⊙	☑
ASEAN	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
India	⊙	☑	⊙	☑			
Australia	⊙	⊙	⊙	☑			☑
New Zealand	⊙	⊙	☑	☑		☑	

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, PRC = People's Republic of China, Rep. = Republic.

Notes:

1. ASEAN = Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam.

2. ☑ = concluded, ⊙ = under negotiation, and ⊙ = under consideration.

[Table 3. Free Trade Agreements in East Asia<sup>53</sup>]

Lastly, Hu and Wen made multiple trips to many parts across the world, especially focusing on Asian neighboring countries. This diplomacy strategy, which is often named 'charm offensive' is to promote the collective development and mutual cooperation in economic spheres as well as to earn supports from its neighbors by utilizing its economic power. This actually worked and helped to create considerable positive images of the country in the region.

### *c. Multilateral Diplomacy*

As mentioned in the earlier section, China began to actively participate in multilateral institution since mid-1990s. Hu and Wen also continued this legacy of

<sup>53</sup> Yunling Zhang, and Minghui Shen. "The Status of East Asian Free Trade Agreements," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2012.

Chinese foreign policy during 2000s. The key motives and strategic calculation, which was largely guided by realist interests, was closely related to its main objectives of regional policy. First, of course, China needed a peaceful and stable environment conducive to its national growth, and the CCP reached the conclusion that multilateral institutions could be function as an effective means to alleviate increasingly diverse and complex regional issues such as terrorism, infectious diseases, natural disasters, North Korea's nuclear crisis, transnational crimes, and energy issues, etc. These regional issues were becoming more and more complicated and diverse that one country solely could not effectively manage them, so the concerted efforts of regional countries were needed for China to maintain its favorable environment for continuing its modernization program.

Moreover, China has made substantial efforts to build its image as a responsible power, contributing to regional peace and prosperity<sup>54</sup>. With China's growing economic and military capability, there had been widespread concerns and misgivings among other neighboring countries and also constant pressure from the Western-led China containment policy. Particularly, relations with the external major powers, especially Japan and United States had complicated Chinese foreign policy and often acted as critical constraints to China's strategic move in the region. To effectively respond and counter such movements and concerns shared among neighboring states, Chinese leaders decided to move beyond the traditional stress on

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<sup>54</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "China's Approaches toward Regional Cooperation in East Asia: Motivations and Calculations," 54.

the principle of bilateralism toward engaging more and more in regional multilateralism, shouldering more responsibilities in international affairs.

*“As a responsible member of the international community, China abides by international law and the generally recognized principles governing international relations, and eagerly fulfils its international responsibility”*

*-China’s Peaceful Development, 2011*

One Chinese scholar explained this move as the strategic shift from stressing ‘self-constraint (知我约束)’ to ‘accepting constraint (接受约束)’<sup>55</sup>. By “accepting the collectively made rules, action norms, and institutional arrangements, and keep the promises and responsibilities”, China believed that it would alleviate neighbors’ suspicions and demonstrate its benign intentions. According to some studies, this strategic move indeed had positive effect, creating positive images of China toward its neighbors. In 1997 Asian financial crisis, China’s refusal to devalue its currency, which considerably contributed to regional financial stability, was one example of China becoming a more responsible actor in the regional affairs.

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<sup>55</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “China’s Approaches toward Regional Cooperation in East Asia: Motivations and Calculations,” 55.

Domain <sup>o</sup>	Multilateralism Platforms in East Asia <sup>o</sup>
Politics <sup>o</sup>	ASEAN-Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS) <sup>o</sup>
Economy <sup>o</sup>	Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3 (APT), <u>Tuman River Cooperation Project</u> , <u>Boao Asia Forum (BAF)</u> <sup>o</sup>
Security <sup>o</sup>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Six-Party Talks <sup>o</sup>
Social development <sup>o</sup>	Greater Mekong River Environmental Protection Mechanism, East Asia Environmental Protection Annual Conference, ASEAN+3 Public Health Cooperation Mechanism <sup>o</sup>

[Table 4. China's Engagement in Regional Multilateralism<sup>56</sup>]

However, Chinese participation in the regional multilateral platforms during Hu's period was still limited in many aspects. One of the important reasons was China's persistent favor of the 'ASEAN-way' approach in solving conflicts among membership countries. China had been consistently preferred an informal and soft-approach in developing multilateralism in the region in contrast to legally binding resolutions that might harm its state sovereignty. The ASEAN-way approach refers to an informal and personal working process, based on principles of consultation, non-interference and consensus, in addressing certain problems among membership countries. This way of strategic thinking and approach had vividly been witnessed throughout Hu's era in China's dealing with the on-going maritime disputes with regional countries in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. China has always spared no efforts to protect its sovereignty and fought against external criticism of China's domestic practices in the name of state sovereignty. In this regard, Chinese

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<sup>56</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "China's Approaches toward Regional Cooperation in East Asia: Motivations and Calculations," 57.

multilateral diplomacy during Hu's period made considerable efforts in participating regional multilateralism based on mutual respect and non-interference.

*"We should all oppose acts of encroachment on other countries' sovereignty, forceful interference in a country's internal affairs, and willful use or threat of military force."*

*-Hu Jintao's Speech at UN, 2005*

#### *d. Soft Power Diplomacy*

China has put tremendous efforts to advance its soft power since 1990s. Coined by the prominent scholar in international relations, Joseph Nye, the term soft power refers to the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion<sup>57</sup>". According to Nye, the success of the state mostly depends on both hard and soft power – the ability to coerce others as well as the power to shape their long-term attitudes and choices. Others also use words like attractiveness, influence, and charm to describe the concept. It includes a country's culture, political thoughts and ideologies, values, ideas, and government policy. Chinese leadership now well understands that the physical power and materialistic incentives are not enough in inducing necessary supports and respects from other countries on its way to become the global great power.

Although the efforts to strengthen the soft power had continued since 1990s,

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<sup>57</sup> Joseph S Nye Jr, *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, Public affairs, 2004.

the first official and integrated efforts to formulate the Chinese style soft power came into being from the Hu's period in early 2000s. As Chinese materialistic capacity grew rapidly, Chinese leaders and academia increasingly realized the need for enhancing its soft power in order to look more attractive and charming to its neighbors, thereby demonstrating its benign intents. In the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP in 2007, Hu also emphasized that "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture".

In a broad sense, Chinese efforts on developing its soft power under the Hu's leadership could be broadly divided largely into three parts- i) development of the China model (中国模式) or so-called "Beijing Consensus", ii) the promotion of the Chinese culture, and iii) the sophisticated foreign policy design<sup>58</sup>. Firstly, China suggested its own development model with Chinese characteristics, combining the authoritarian political system with a free market economy as an alternative model to the existing western model. Chinese political leaders often argued that its development experience and wisdom could provide an alternative to countries which shares the similar dual-goal of economic growth and regime stability, especially aiming at countries in Africa and Middle East.

Secondly, Hu and the 4<sup>th</sup> generation leadership were devoted to promote its culture and tradition based on China's rich traditional resources. There are several examples of such efforts. The most typical example of Chinese soft power efforts, the

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<sup>58</sup> 조영남, "중국의 부상과 동아시아 지역질서의 변화," *중소연구* 34, no. 2 (2010): 51-52.

Confucius Institute was first established in Seoul in 2004. Funded by the Chinese government the center provided language courses, cooking and calligraphy, and other events to promote Chinese language and culture. By the end of 2012, there were more than 4000 institutes in more than 50 countries around all over the world. Furthermore, Chinese leaders under Hu also made efforts to build international forums and conferences including 2001 Boao Forum for Asia, 2004 Beijing Forum on “The Harmony of Civilizations and Prosperity for All”, and also Shanghai Forum “Economic Globalization and the Choice of Asia” in 2005. The hosting of international forums in China’s major cities became very popular as well<sup>59</sup>. The successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games (2008) and the Shanghai Expo (2010) were symbolic events for China to boast its rising power and confidence to the international community.

Last but not the least, the Chinese style of the diplomatic concepts and ideas were developed sophisticatedly to cope with its need to promote positive image. As Jiang developed his own novel concept of the “Scientific Development (科学发展观)” and the “New Security Concept” during 1990s, Hu came up with his own diplomatic concepts and ideas during his terms in 2000s. Two key foreign policy concepts which had developed during the Hu’s administration are the “Peaceful Development<sup>60</sup> (和平

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Y.S Cheng, "China's regional strategy and challenges in East Asia," *China Perspectives* 2013, no. 2013/2 (2013): 53-65.

<sup>60</sup> The concept was initially developed in 2003 by a prominent policy advisor Zheng Bijian as “Peaceful rise” but modified to “Peaceful Development” to dispel neighboring countries worries about its increasing power and influences; Bijan, Zheng, "China's peaceful rise to

发展)” and the “Harmonious World (和谐世界)”. The first idea referred to the fact that although China was a growing power, it would not follow the bad precedent of great powers in the past using military force and material wealth to threaten others, while the second referred to China’s longing for global peace and co-existence rather than conflicts and use of force<sup>61</sup>. These concepts were invented in consideration of neighbor states’ fear and concern regarding the China’s rising power and rather obscure and uncertain future path of China. Having understood regional states’ fear and suspicion, the Chinese government has repeatedly and officially claimed that it would not seek hegemony and will walk peaceful road in several official documents and speeches including the famous two white papers on the China’s peaceful development in 2005 and 2011.

*“China will unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, making great efforts to achieve a peaceful, open, cooperative and harmonious development”*

*“China does not seek regional hegemony or sphere of influence, nor does it want to exclude any country from participating in regional cooperation”*

*-China’s Peaceful Development, 2011*

*“Building a harmonious world of sustained peace and common prosperity is a common wish of the people throughout the world as well as lofty goal of China”*

*-China’ Peaceful Development Road, 2005*

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great-power status," *Foreign Affairs*. 84 (2005): 18.

<sup>61</sup> Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese foreign policy: an introduction* (Routledge, 2020), 22.

In sum, China during the Hu's period noticeably started to emphasize the importance of the soft power to fight against external pressure and expand its influences in the region. China under the Hu's leadership not only attempted to promote its development model and traditions, but also create a more sophisticated diplomatic concepts and new discourses to gradually increase its presence and influence in the region.

## **IV. China's Asian Regional Policy in the Xi Jinping Era**

The advent of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation centered on Xi Jinping (习近平) and Li Keqiang (李克强) in the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012 was an important historical moment for the country. Having finished the first decade of the aimed “strategic period of opportunities”, China became the irrefutable great power in the Asian region, and on its path to achieving its vision of the global superpower. Over the past decade, China became the second largest economy in the world with one of the highest military expenditures. The term G2 (Group-2) often used among prominent scholars and media during the time, which symbolically reflected China's increased international status as the major power in the international relations. Today, with the emergence of the new generation leaders, China declared the “New Era” in its history, aiming for becoming greater and reviving its past glory of great Chinese nations. In this period of both the opportunity and uncertainty, the newly elected 5<sup>th</sup> generation leaders were filled with a strong sense of confidence and enthusiasm to make the country greater once again.

In the meantime, the importance of the regional policy has increasingly stressed within Chinese political circles as the region has gradually transformed into the central stage of global economy and politics. Especially, since 2010 when Obama administration decided its “Asia Rebalancing” or “Pivot to Asia” policy, the region has become the main strategic domain for two most powerful countries in the world, complicating the regional politics. Moreover, another strategic competitor in East Asia,

Japan's move toward revising its peaceful constitution and militarization, made it more difficult for China to ensure more strategic space for its future rise. So Chinese government under Xi has put unprecedented efforts on its peripheral policy, especially toward the East Asia, in order to effectively respond to the US-led alliances' effort to contain China, and also shape stable and peaceful environment to continue its national development. Moreover, as some scholars have argued, Chinese diplomacy has been much more proactive and assertive with increased capability to realize it. In this context, this chapter will explore China's Asian regional policy guided by Xi during his first term. Like earlier chapter, this chapter comprises of the three sub-categories for comparative analysis - i) *perception of international situation*, ii) *challenges and objectives*, iii) and its *actual regional postures and practices*.

## 1. Perception of International Situation

In short, the perception of the international situation during the first term of Xi's administration remained essentially unchanged in its nature from the previous Hu's regime. Several official documents and rhetoric reaffirmed that the "peace" and "development" were still the dominant theme of the world today. China again declared that it would adhere to the road of peaceful development based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, and would not seek hegemony forever. Moreover, its view on deepening trend toward the multi-polarization and economic globalization was remained. During the 18<sup>th</sup> party congress report of CCP in 2012, the general secretary

Hu Jintao said that “the world today is undergoing profound and complex changes, but peace and development remain the underlying trends of our times” in his last speech as the paramount leader of China. He also added “the global trends toward multi-polarity and economic globalization are deepening”. Other official documents also shared the same perspectives regarding the perception of the time.

*“Since the beginning of the new century, profound and complex changes have taken place in the world, but peace and development remain the underlying trends of our times. The global trends toward economic globalization and multi-polarity are intensifying ... ..”*

*-National Defense, 2013*

*“Peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit have become an irresistible tide of the times”*

*-National Defense, 2015*

However, there were also some minor but noticeable changes in China’s perception toward the world trend. First of all, despite no fundamental changes to its worldview that the external environments are still generally favorable on the whole, “the world is still far from being peaceful”. The global financial crisis in 2008 had far-reaching impacts on the global economy, and there were growing factors of instability and uncertainty. Moreover, many official documents such as the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report in 2012 and the National Defense white papers published in 2013 and 2015

particularly pointed out the “signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionalism,” obviously targeting the current neo-liberal international order led by the United States. Some scholars advocate that these signals the China’s discontent and dissatisfaction toward the US-led world order today<sup>62</sup>.

*“There are, however, new threats from hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionalism”*

*-National Defense, 2015*

*“Some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanded its military presence in the region, and frequently makes the situation there tenser.”*

*-National Defense, 2013*

Another eye-catching feature of the worldview during the Xi’s first term was its awareness of changing distribution of capabilities, especially since the global financial crisis in 2008-09. During the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report, Hu mentioned that “emerging market economics and developing countries are gaining overall strength, tipping the balance of international forces in favor of the maintenance of world peace<sup>63</sup>”. While many developed countries in the West experienced severe economic

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<sup>62</sup> 박병광. “시진핑 지도부의 등장과 중국의 대외정책: ‘지속’ 과 ‘변화’ 의 측면을 중심으로.” 전략연구 60 (2013): 155-56; 서정경. “시진핑 2기 정부의 외교 전망.” 국가전략 24, no. 1 (2018): 5-32.

<sup>63</sup> Jintao Hu, “Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 18th Party Congress,” Embassy of People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 2012. [http://www.chinaembassy.org/eng/zt/18th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress\\_Eng/t992917.htm](http://www.chinaembassy.org/eng/zt/18th_CPC_National_Congress_Eng/t992917.htm) (accessed Mar 23, 2020).

recessions, and their influence had shrank over few years, newly developing markets including the BRICS countries<sup>64</sup> were expanding their influence in global economic arena. The new establishment of the G20 group was one of the symbolic events which evidently showed this changing order.

Simultaneously, with the overall growth of the national power, the Chinese diplomacy during the first term of Xi Jinping revealed growing confidence of the country in managing international affairs, seemingly moving beyond the rather passive and reactive diplomacy of the past. At the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report in 2017, president Xi revealed that the country entered the so-called ‘New Era’, saying “today, we are closer, more confident, and more capable than ever before of making the goal of national rejuvenation a reality”<sup>65</sup>. Not only the newly adopted concepts and ideas such as “New Type of International Relationship”, “New Security Concept”, and “Community of Common Destiny” but also self-centered initiatives like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) all implied substantial changes in Chinese diplomacy path and posture in the coming years. Moreover, closely inter-related with the changing trend, China’s peripheral policy during Xi’s period, especially Asian regional foreign policy, has been significantly stressed more and more with the growing strategic importance of the region amid the

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<sup>64</sup> BRICS refers to the five major emerging markets in the global economy: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. They are all members of G20, increasingly expanding their influences on both regional and international affairs. According to statistics, BRICS members had a combined nominal GDP of \$ 40.55 trillion dollars, 32% of World’s GDP PPP) and accounted for more than 40% of world population. China hosted 9<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in city of Xiamen on Sept 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Jinping Xi, “Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress.” Xinhua, 2017. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725942.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm) (accessed April 2, 2020).

on-going Sino-US competition.

## 2. Challenges and Objectives

Based on the continued perception of the international situation, the key objectives of Chinese regional policy toward the Asia also mostly remained during the Xi's first term. In order to achieve its goal of rejuvenating the nation and becoming global major power, China still needed the stable and peaceful external environment favorable for its comprehensive national growth. Moreover, at the same time, there has been the growing need for China to effectively counter the US-led China containment policy, which has become more and more evident after Obama administration's announcement of the Asia rebalancing strategy. Many experts and scholars predict that these two key objectives of Chinese regional policy, which have existed more than forty years since Deng's opening door policy was first adopted, will be likely to be remained for at least two or more decades to come.

Some scholars have argued that the new 5<sup>th</sup> generation leaders, compared to past regimes, were in favorable condition to accomplish their diplomatic objectives. With the past 40 years of a drastic economic development, the country now has more resources and capacity to shape and manage international affairs to its favor. One prominent scholar claimed that there were four favorable conditions that made Xi in a better position to manage his diplomatic affairs compared to his predecessor. Youngnam Cho argued that the stabilization of elite politics, product of state-building

over the past years, high public approval rate of CCP rule legitimacy, and China's increased international status made Xi's era more favorable for both the domestic and global governance than the previous regime under Hu<sup>66</sup>. The famous speech 'Chinese Dream' in 2012 given by Xi soon after his power ascendancy was one symbolic event of showing China's growing confidence and optimism<sup>67</sup>. With growing national power and influence, China will more likely to more actively engage in regional issues and affairs, thus gradually expanding its strategic sphere from region to the world.

However, on the other hand, Xi also faced with greater challenges than the past regime to manage China's foreign affairs, especially in the East Asia region. Again, mainly four challenges have been discussed among academic circles in relation to the Chinese regional policy at Xi's era. Firstly, there have been growing difficulties in reconciling the evident contradictions in its conflicting regional diplomatic agendas<sup>68</sup>. More specifically, there is a contradiction in its regional policy between maintaining regional stability and peace and protecting its national core interests. This difficult dilemma is particularly evident in maritime territorial disputes with its neighboring countries as shown in the cases of the East China/South China Sea disputes. Possessing military power to defend its core interests, China is ready to flex its muscles to

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<sup>66</sup> 조영남. 「중국의 꿈- 시진핑 리더십과 중국의 미래」 (서울:민음사, 2013), 28-34.

<sup>67</sup> After his ascendancy in 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, Xi and newly elected members the Standing Committee of the CCP, including Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejinag, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan, and Zhang Gaoli, visited The Road toward Renewal" exhibition at the National Museum of China. In this historic site, Xi proposed his vision of accomplishing Chinese dream, which consists of two specific objectives – i) bringing about "a moderately prosperous society in all respects" by the year 2021, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary for CCP, and ii) building "an affluent, strong, civilized and harmonious socialist modern country".

<sup>68</sup> Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?", 15-17.

maximize its national core interests, while it still needs to create a benign image as a responsible great power and shape the regional environment peaceful and stable. One Chinese scholar well summarized this dilemma by stating “maintaining regional stability without damaging China’s national interests, defending China’s national interest without causing conflicts<sup>69</sup>”. Moreover, rather ambiguous concept of the ‘core interests’ creates more confusion, thus complicating the problem even more.

Second, despite the seemingly more confident Chinese posture and rhetoric under the Xi’s administration and substantial increase in its comprehensive power, China’s capability and experience of managing both regional and international affairs are still limited in many ways. Regionally, its ability and experience in shaping the favorable external environment and influencing the behaviors of regional states are still somewhat limited. Especially, in terms of soft power capability, Chinese value and normative power have not been viewed as attractive and reliable enough for regional countries to depend on. Chinese government efforts to increase its soft power since the Hu’s period reflect its self-awareness of the much-needed soft power. Its various economic initiatives as well as military power solely might not sufficient to induce regional actors’ support and respect. In addition, China’s inexperience in managing regional and international missions such as humanitarian assistance, global terrorism prevention and disaster relief operations also reflects its inability and lack of competence managing regional affairs in more constructive ways.

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<sup>69</sup> 邓媛. “曲星：中国外交的顶层设计与底线思维”，国际先驱导报，” 2013 <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/67787.html> (accessed Mar 23, 2020).

Third, Xi has faced with more complex and uncertain regional environment compared to his predecessor. One of the most significant challenges among various destabilizing factors is the United States' so-called "Pivot to Asia" rebalancing strategy since 2010. Since then US and its alliances' strategic pressure toward China has significantly changed China's external strategic conditions. Although the United States continued to deny that the rebalancing strategy was not aimed specifically for China, there were many speculations that the main objective of the policy was to contain China and maintain its supremacy in the region. Meanwhile, the growing confrontations between China and regional states further put China in an unfavorable position in the region. Many counterpart countries, backed by United States, showed more provocative postures toward China, thus making the problem more complicated. At the same time, the long-held regional strategic competition between China and Japan continued to intensify tension in East Asia. Even more unfortunate for China, the advent of Trump administration in 2017, and its subsequent hard-line policies toward the country<sup>70</sup> made it harder for China to ensure its strategic space and expand its influence.

Lastly, Xi and the 5<sup>th</sup> generation leaderships continued to be faced with the growing domestic demands and challenges. Despite its surprising growth, the Chinese society is still suffering from the diverse and complex social problems such as

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<sup>70</sup> The National Security Strategy (2017) and following National Defense Strategy (2018), the most authoritative document related to United States' military strategic thinking and vision, stipulated China along with Russia as revisionist states, which attempt to challenge the current world order.

unbalanced development, widening inequality, high unemployment rate, rampant corruption, rapidly aging population, and low level of trust. Also, there have been increasing voices for more democratized and free media and political system. For CCP to retain its rule legitimacy and win support from its people, Chinese leaders should not only continue economic development necessary to meet various kinds of social demand and ensure resources to treat them right, but also effectively offset external threats and demonstrate a greater and stronger Chinese nation to its general public. In this sense, the main focus of the Chinese governance still lies on its domestic development. Therefore, the Chinese diplomacy and foreign policy formulation are highly depended on the domestic political processes and internal dynamics.

In conclusion, despite the comparably favorable settings, Xi faced with both the internal and external complex challenges. Given the significant importance of the Xi's period in Chinese history, Xi is shouldered with the responsibilities to effectively manage somewhat substantial and uneasy issues in and out.

### 3. Regional Postures and Practices

During the first term of the Xi's reign, the strategic importance of peripheral policy- especially Asian region where all aspects of its national interests exist- has been significantly stressed. Accordingly, there were some noticeable changes and adjustments in terms of diplomatic directions and priorities. China increasingly has understood that a properly directed and sophisticated neighboring policy is

indispensable and significant factor for China to achieve its necessary diplomatic goals in the coming years. Against this background, this section will explore the same four categories used to analyze the Chinese regional policy under Hu in the earlier chapter to see what has been continued and changed under the new leadership. Again, these four categories are not exclusive to each other, but rather complementary to one another in understanding overall picture of how China's Asian regional policy is unfolding under the new leadership.

*a. Good Neighborly Diplomacy*

As mentioned earlier, the strategic importance of the Chinese peripheral diplomacy was significantly stressed during the first term of Xi Jinping. The 18<sup>th</sup> party congress report emphasized that “we will continue to promote friendship and partnership with our neighbors, consolidate friendly relations and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with them, and ensure that China's development will bring more benefits to our neighbors”. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> party congress, Xi has significantly stressed good neighborly diplomacy and elevated its position in its diplomacy priorities. On October 24-25 2013, CCP held an unprecedented Work Forum on Chinese Peripheral Diplomacy. In this work forum, Xi gave a new direction and concept in its neighboring diplomacy, which can be summarized with four Chinese character “Amity (親), Sincerity (誠), Mutual Benefit (惠), Inclusiveness (容)”. During the Forum Xi

stressed:

*“We should strive to deepen the pattern featuring mutual benefits and win-win results. We should make overall plans of economic, trade, scientific and technological, financial and other resources, make good use of comparative advantages to pinpoint strategic integrating point, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with the neighbouring countries, and actively participate in regional economic cooperation<sup>71</sup>”*

*-Work Forum on Chinese Peripheral Diplomacy, 2013*

Regarding the meaning of newly suggested diplomatic concept “amity, sincerity, mutual respect, inclusiveness”, one authoritative source explained:

*“Amity refers to consolidating the friendship marked by geographical proximity and intimate relationship... Sincerity refers to the way of treating people with sincerity and getting along with other people by gaining their trust... Mutual benefit refers to the idea of cooperation that benefits the surrounding areas and produces mutually beneficial win-win outcomes... Inclusiveness refers to demonstration of the big power broadmindedness, openness, tolerance and readiness to seek common grounds while reserving differences<sup>72</sup>”*

*-People’s Daily, 2013*

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<sup>71</sup> Jinping, Xi, “Let the Sense of Community Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighboring Countries- Important Remarks at the Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/t1093870.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml) (accessed Mar 10, 2020).

<sup>72</sup> Translated version available at: Michael D, “Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” 30.

In this forum, Xi stressed the strategic importance of its neighboring countries to China, and the need for China to “advance the diplomatic work with neighboring countries in a full-fledged manner”<sup>73</sup>. Based on the significantly increased importance of its periphery policy, both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang visited numerous neighboring states right after they officially assumed power in March 2013. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they visited total 22 countries overseas, met 65 foreign leaders who visited China, and concluded more than 800 Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with foreign countries<sup>74</sup>. Among 22 countries Xi and Li visited, more than half countries were neighboring countries including Russia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Brunei. In 2014, Chinese leaders also visited Northeast Asian countries like South Korea and Mongolia, putting efforts to advance strategic partnerships with East Asian countries.

Since implying substantial changes in diplomatic direction and practices in 2013 Work Forum, Xi has actually proposed a number of diplomatic principles aimed to establish the good neighborly relations and partnerships. Xi newly established maritime small leading group in 2012, and also created a new National Security Commission (NSC) in 2013 to develop more integrated and holistic approach in managing complicated regional foreign affairs. In 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Shanghai, Xi proposed ‘New Asian

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> 王毅, “王毅: 2013年中国外交最鲜明的特点是动进取,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Sweden, 2013, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cese/chn/xwdt/t1135277.htm> (accessed April 13, 2020).

Security (新亚洲安全观)’ and ‘Asian Consciousness (亚洲意识)’. Xi emphasized the regional security mechanism that “stress common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security” to tackle rising challenges in the region, and also went further to add that “security problems in Asia should eventually be solved by Asians themselves through cooperation”. Xi emphasized repeatedly about the need to move further beyond the Cold-war mentality, and develop more constructive wisdoms and solutions to regional security which better fit to Asian region.

Also, at the Central Conference on Working Relating to Foreign Affairs held in Beijing at the end of the same year, the Chinese Communist Party decided to put its neighboring policy on the top priorities. In its official document, the promotion of neighborhood diplomacy and turning the neighboring areas into a community of common destiny were markedly mentioned first in the order of its diplomatic priorities and tasks. This showed the substantial changes in the order of priorities compared to the past, strongly implying increased status of neighboring policy in its diplomatic practices.

On the other hand, however, Chinese government has shown increasingly assertive and uncompromising diplomatic stance on issues regarding its national core interests. In 2013 work forum, Xi emphasized twice that China need to protect its national sovereignty and safeguard national core interests as part of periphery

diplomacy<sup>75</sup>, along with the need for promoting friendly and win-win relationships with its neighbors. Also at the study session with members of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee (CPCCC), Xi said:

*“We will stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests. No country should presume that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the ‘bitter fruit’ of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests.”<sup>76</sup>*

-CPCCC, 2013

He also added that China was ready to “cope with complexities, enhance the nation’s capacity in safeguarding maritime rights and interests, and resolutely safeguard the nation’s maritime rights and interests”<sup>77</sup>. This increasing stress of China on its national core interests was also consistently shown on high-profile government officials and official diplomatic documents. For example, in 2014, Ministry spokesperson Geng Yansheng said:

*“Our determination and will to defend national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests are unswerving; on this issue there is absolutely no room for*

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<sup>75</sup> Jinping, Xi, “Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Peripheral Diplomatic Work Forum,” China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, 2013, [http://www.cciced.net/cciceden/NEWSCENTER/LatestEnvironmentalandDevelopmentNews/201310/t0131030\\_82626.html](http://www.cciced.net/cciceden/NEWSCENTER/LatestEnvironmentalandDevelopmentNews/201310/t0131030_82626.html) (accessed Mar 23, 2020); Bonnie Glaser, and Deep Pal. "China's periphery diplomacy initiative: Implications for China neighbors and the United States," *China-US Focus* (2013).

<sup>76</sup> Global Times Reporter, “Xi Vows Peaceful Development While Not Waiving Legitimate Rights,” *Global Times*, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/758863.shtml> (accessed Mar 23, 2020).

<sup>77</sup> People's Daily Reporter, “Xi Advocates Efforts to Boost China's Maritime Power,” *People's Daily*, 2013, <http://en.people.cn/90785/8348224.html> (accessed April 22, 2020).

*bargaining, and any provocative actions will not be tolerated.*<sup>78</sup>”

*-Chinese Government, 2014*

Other official documents also repeatedly confirmed the same stance that it would not tolerate any foreign country’s attempt to infringe its national core interests. For example, China’s National Defense white paper published in 2013 explicitly stated:

*“... .. readily respond to and resolutely deter any provocative action which undermines China’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; and firmly safeguard China’s core national interests”*

*-National Defense, 2013*

Many scholars and observers in this field have also detected various signs of China’s more seemingly assertive and uncompromising diplomatic behaviors. Some scholars argue that China already has shown a fundamental shift in its overall foreign policy since its leadership transition in 2012.

In the context of Asia, China has attempted to achieve two specific tasks to enhance its position and influence in the region. Firstly, China tried to resolve prolonged territorial disputes that significantly hampered its strategical position in Asia. However, unfortunately, although Xi put good neighborly policy on the top of his diplomatic priorities, and made considerable efforts to resolve existing conflicts, a

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<sup>78</sup> Translated version available at: Michael D, “Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” 6.

series of events involving territorial disputes led China's position more unfavorable. Since 2010, the territorial disputes between China and other claimant countries in East Asia became intensified, especially on-going conflicts regarding the South China Sea and East China Sea issues. The establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, continuous build-up of A2/AD capabilities and the creation of new administrative body in SanSha (三沙) city are some examples showing China's tougher and uncompromising stance on the related issues<sup>79</sup>. Some Chinese scholars even strongly assert that its prolonged self-restraint approach in managing regional issues has failed to resolve territorial issues, thus failed to shape stable external environment<sup>80</sup>.

Also, the new leader continued to forge networks of the strategic partnerships in his first term. The scope of creating partnerships has become much more broaden, moving beyond the region. However, Asia region remained the most important strategic theater where the country should concentrate its diplomatic capabilities and resources, especially after the US's rebalancing Asia foreign policy. In particular, strategic importance of ASEAN countries were repeatedly stressed. For example, at 10<sup>th</sup> China ASEAN Expo keynote speech, premier Li said:

*"I solemnly declare that China's good-neighborly policy toward the ASEAN is not a matter of expediency, but a long-term strategic option of China. China will firmly prioritize ASEAN member countries in the country's peripheral diplomacy, firmly deepen*

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<sup>79</sup> Michael D, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," 25.

<sup>80</sup> Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," 153–184.

*the strategic partnership with the ASEAN, and firmly cooperate with the ASEAN to jointly safeguard peace and stability in the region<sup>81</sup>.*”

*-Li Keqiang, 10<sup>th</sup> China ASEAN Expo, 2013*

	Comprehensive Strategic Partners		Strategic Partners		Partners		Total	
	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %
Africa	2	6.9	3	12.0	6	28.6	11	14.7
Americas	5	17.2	4	16.0	2	9.5	11	14.7
Asia	9	31.0	9	36.0	6	28.6	24	32.0
Europe	10	34.5	4	16.0	7	33.3	21	28.0
Middle East	1	3.5	4	16.0	0	0	5	6.7
Oceania	2	6.9	1	4.0	0	0	3	4.0
Total	29	100.0	25	100.0	21	100.0	75	100.0

**[Table 5. Strategic Partnerships During the Xi’s Period]**

*b. Economic Diplomacy*

With its overwhelming economic prowess and growing economic interdependency, economic diplomacy has been always the China’s main instrument of the Chinese diplomacy. According to one study, more than half of China’s top 10 trading partners are in Asia and 70 percent of its outbound investment is toward Asian region<sup>82</sup>. Deepening economic ties and growing interdependence in Asian region made it critical for China to utilize its economic capacity in promoting its goal of promoting

<sup>81</sup> Keqiang Li, “Premier Li Keqiang's Keynote Speech at 10th China-ASEAN Expo,” People's Daily, 2013, <http://en.people.cn/90883/8388723.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Avinash Godbole, “China’s Asia Strategy under President Xi Jinping,” *Strategic Analysis* 39, no. 3 (2015): 299

peaceful and stable environment for concentrating its domestic development. According to the official announcement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are three main pillars of economic diplomacy under the leadership of Xi- i) Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), ii) multilateral FTAs such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP), and iii) taking more initiatives in international discourse. More and more participating in hegemony competition with the United States, China has attempted to create and build more self-centered alternatives to the current US-led international world order.

First, the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路, BRI) is probably the most ambitious and signatory policy in the Xi' era. The BRI plan, also known as the Chinese version of the Marshall Plan<sup>83</sup> or the 'project of the Century', is the global development strategy adopted in 2013, which consists of two strategies, the "Silk Road Economic Belt (丝路经济带)" and the "21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (海上丝路)"<sup>84</sup>. The 'Belt' here refers to overland corridors, linking from the Moscow to Western Europe, while the 'Road' refers to the sea routes, connecting the Europe, Central Asia, Middle East and East Africa, and Southeast Asian regions. Now more than 70 economies are participating in the scheme, accounting for nearly 65% of the world population and the one-third of the world GDP.

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<sup>83</sup> Lily Kuo, and Niko Kommenda. "What Is China's Belt and Road Initiative?" *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer> (accessed April 25, 2020).

<sup>84</sup> The 'Silk Road Economic Belt' was first proposed by Xi at his speech at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, while the '21th Century Maritime Silk Road' was introduced at Indonesian Parliament in autumn in 2013 respectively.

According to the Chinese government, this initiative is “a bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future together” and also aims “to promote orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets by enhancing connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas”<sup>85</sup>. At the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report in 2017, Xi explained:

*“China will actively promote international co-operation through the Belt and Road Initiative. In doing so, we hope to achieve policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity and thus build a new platform for international co-operation to create new drivers of shared development”*

*-Xi, 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report, 2017*

In the context of Asian strategy, Chinese BRI initiative implies a strategic importance. Calling for more connectivity, unimpeded trade, and financial integration, the plan pushed for more self-centered economic networks against the current Western-based financial order. China also subsequently established the AIIB and the Silk Road Fund to financially support the plan. It claims that the project will be more inclusive and sustainable, which would promote a common prosperity and mutual benefits of all countries involved. This also implies the China’s long-held belief that the current Western based economic order is not equitable and inclusive enough. In this sense, China attempts to reshape the current ‘unfair’ US-based economic order and enhance

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its influence in the Asia region. Moreover, China will be able to solve its over-supply of domestic products and thereby promote more sustainable economic growth, secure more stable energy supplies from overseas, maintain neighboring environment more favorable by increasing connectivity, and effectively counter US-led containment policy by activating this ambitious project.



[Figure 3. China’s Belt and Road Initiative<sup>86</sup>]

Second, China under Xi Jinping’s leadership not only continued to promote

<sup>86</sup> China Daily, “Italy Plans to Join Belt and Road Initiative,” *China Daily*, 2019, [https://www.chinadailyhk.com/customize/nation/201903/237203/FT\\_Italy\\_plans\\_to\\_join\\_Belt\\_and\\_Road\\_Initiative.html](https://www.chinadailyhk.com/customize/nation/201903/237203/FT_Italy_plans_to_join_Belt_and_Road_Initiative.html) (accessed April 22, 2020).

the bilateral FTAs with neighboring countries, but also increasingly stressed more inclusive multilateral economic cooperation within the region. The most typical examples would be Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Free Trade Area of Asia Pacific (FTAAP). Both of them have been strongly promoted by Beijing in order to not only facilitate trade and foreign investment, dispute settlement, e-commerce, and economic cooperation among regional countries but also counter US influence in the region. Particularly, Xi's administration strongly moving from stressing RCEP to FTAAP that includes the United States. This move partially shows the China's growing confidence that it would retain its regional initiative and agenda-setting power against the US with the support of many developing countries in Southeast Asia, and its cooperation with the APEC's principle of the open regionalism.

Compared to his predecessor, Xi significantly expanded the scope and degree of economic multilateralism. While Hu's economic diplomacy largely concentrated on the bilateral FTAs between countries, Xi emphasized more on an economic multilateralism. At the same time, it also has attempted to further develop bilateral FTAs. Meanwhile, China has also been negotiating the China-Japan-Korea Free Trade Agreement (CJK FTA), major economies of East Asia region, to formulate economic strategic force to reshape international economic order as well as to strengthen the regional influences.



(Based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

**[Figure 4. Broadening FTAs during Xi's Period<sup>87</sup>]**

Last but not the least, China signaled taking more actively role in shaping new rules and movement in current global economy, which has been existed since the World War II. In 2014, China established New Development Bank and Contingent Reserve Arrangement, which was first introduced in 6<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit meeting in Brazil the same year. It also established the AIIB in support for infrastructure projects in Asian developing countries. Many analysts and experts have argued that these new movements led by China showed dissonance between the existing dominant economy order and the rising developing countries' growing demand for change, and also

<sup>87</sup> Nippon News Reporter, "TPP Negotiations and Japan." *Nippon News Agency*, 2013, <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00030/tpn-negotiations-and-japan.html>.

China's motive to use this momentum, supported by many developing and Third world countries, to expand its influence both regionally and globally. In fact, the main objectives and roles of these newly developed international organs are very similar to those of Western powers- such as International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Asian Development Bank (ADB). In this sense, China has increasingly acted as the representative of developing countries and promotor of South-South cooperation, attempting to shape and reconstruct existing Western-led global economic order.

In this sense, the scope and degree of the economic diplomacy during the first term of Xi were noticeably broadened and grown. Boasting its growing economic capability and influence, China has increasingly become more proactive and assertive in managing its economic diplomacy, moving beyond its long-held 'self-restraint' and rather passive approach. Backed by the enormous self-centered global initiative, deepening economic ties, and leading new discourses, China in Xi's time is expected to have tremendous impact on reconstruction of the Asian regional order in the coming decades.

### *c. Multilateral Diplomacy*

Like his predecessor, president Xi Jinping also continued to actively engage in the regional multilateralism. In 2013 Boao Asian Forum, Xi proposed 'Asian Community of Common Prosperity', saying that "the Asian countries need to increase

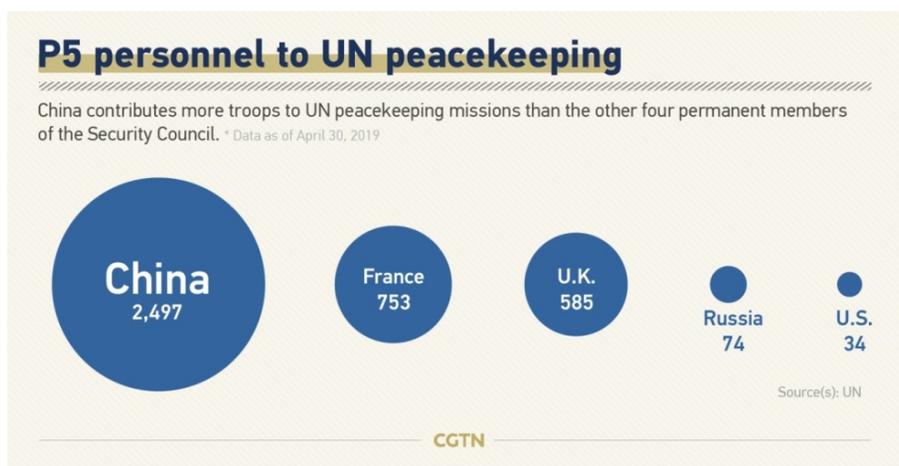
mutual trust and work together to ensure durable peace and stability in our region”. He also added that “what we need to do is to enhance mutual understanding, building consensus, and enrich and deepen cooperation so as to strike a balance among the interests of various parties and build mechanisms that bring benefits to all<sup>88</sup>”. Moreover, during his visit to Indonesia in 2014, Xi proposed ‘Sino-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny’ concept. The same year, Xi also introduced the new Asian security vision, stressing “common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security in Asia’ and the need ‘to innovate our security concept, establish a new regional security cooperation architecture, and jointly build a road for security of Asia that is shared by and win-win to all”. All of these sayings of the supreme leader strongly indicate that China under the new leadership will continue to put efforts to build more region-oriented identity and cooperation shared among regional states.

While strengthening the regional identity and the regional multilateral platforms, China also has continued to actively participate in the existing international institutions to gradually expand its influence. During the Xi’s first term, China more proactively participated in global governance and multilateral platforms such as increasing contribution to United Nations (UN) and Peace Keeping Operations (PKO), IMF, World Bank, G20 meetings, and BRICS grouping. According to one Chinese scholar, China announced to provide US \$ 1 billion Peace and Fund for the next ten

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<sup>88</sup> Jinping, Xi, “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia,” Boao Forum for Asia, 2013, <http://english.boaoforum.org/mtzxxwzxe/7379.jhtml> (accessed May 1, 2020).

years, and its determination to send an 8,000-troop strong regular peacekeeping force, the greatest number to PKOs among permanent members of the Security Council<sup>89</sup>. It is the second-largest financial contributor to UN Peace-keeping operations. Also, after the reform to IMF voting shares concluded in 2010, China’s voting power rose to the third place, only next to the United States and Japan, reflecting its growing presence in global economic governance. In September 2016, Xi claimed that it was time for China to play a more active and significant role in global governance such as climate change maritime disputes, cybersecurity, nuclear safety, and outer space, etc<sup>90</sup>.



[Figure 5. Number of P5 Personnel to UN Peacekeeping<sup>91</sup>]

<sup>89</sup> 张君荣. “中国积极推动全球治理体系变革,” 2016, [http://www.cssn.cn/index/index\\_focus/201610/t20161012\\_3230771.shtml?COLLCC=1682269128](http://www.cssn.cn/index/index_focus/201610/t20161012_3230771.shtml?COLLCC=1682269128)(accessed April 11, 2020).

<sup>90</sup> 习近平, “加强合作推动全球治理体系变革 共同促进人类和平与发展崇高事业.” 新华网, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/28/c\\_1119641652.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/28/c_1119641652.htm) (accessed May 12, 2020).

<sup>91</sup> China Military, “China’s Role in World’s Peacekeeping Cause,” 2019. Available at: [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-05/30/content\\_9518691.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-05/30/content_9518691.htm) (accessed May 12, 2020).

These all signaled that China has continued to attempt to gradually transform from rather passive and self-restrain ‘norm-taker’ to an active ‘norm-maker’ in shaping global norms and structures. While strengthening both economic and political ties with regional countries and regional multilateralism, China also went further to proactively expand its influence at both regional and global level. In sum, now China is well aware of its increased status in the region as well as the international society, and will be likely to continue its efforts to build the positive image as a responsible and benign great power. In this sense, promoting the multilateralism at both levels of region and globe is beneficial in creating and shaping favorable condition for China to continue its national development and move further to become truly influential global leadership.

*d. Soft Power Diplomacy*

Since 2000s, China has put tremendous efforts to enhance its soft power diplomacy or public diplomacy (公共外交) to win the hearts and minds of people in neighboring countries. This was necessary not only for effectively countering the widespread misgivings about the China’s rise and create the positive image of it as a responsible great power, but also gradually expanding its influence in the international affairs with its growing economic and military capabilities. Unlike the traditional power diplomacy, soft power diplomacy is the process of winning minds and hearts of general people. The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and 2010 Shanghai Expo were some significant events for China to boast both its rich cultural inheritance of the past and

remarkable success of modernization of China today both to its people and outside the country.

In conclusion, the soft power diplomacy during the Xi's first term was not substantially different from the Hu's, following the general trend of the previous regimes. In 2013 forum, Xi emphasized that "we should strive to strengthen publicity work, public diplomacy, cultural and people-to-people exchanges with the neighboring countries, and consolidate and expand social and public opinion foundations of the long-term development of relations between China and its neighboring countries"<sup>92</sup>. In 2014, he also claimed that "we should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world". Accordingly, the Chinese government established the China Public Diplomacy Association (中国公共外交协会, CPDA) to facilitate exchanges and promote public diplomacy. However, fundamentally, China under Xi's first term continued what his predecessor had started in general, which includes promoting its culture and traditions, Chinese-style development model, academic exchanges, expansion of institutes and scholarships, and various financial aids and supports to developing countries.

Despite the more dominant aspects of the continuity aspect, one noticeable

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<sup>92</sup> Jinping, Xi, "Let the Sense of Community Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighboring Countries- Important Remarks at the Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/t1093870.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml) (accessed Mar 10, 2020).

feature in Chinese soft power diplomacy during the Xi's first term was the development of several new self-centered diplomatic concepts and ideas. Although the previous regimes also developed their own signatory diplomatic concepts and thoughts in foreign policy-making processes, Xi's novel concepts could be differentiated in terms of the numbers and meanings. The new diplomatic concepts suggested by the Xi's administration evidently reflected its growing confidence and ambition in the world stage, moving beyond the region.

Especially, Xi's report at 19<sup>th</sup> party congress report, at the end of his first term and beginning of the second, introduced more proactive and ambitious concepts, which didn't appear in the past. While there were previously suggested concepts like Xi's signature slogan "Chinese Dream" and "New Asian Security Concept", 19<sup>th</sup> party congress report also introduced a new diplomatic visionary concepts such as "New Type of International Relationship", "Community of Common Prosperity", "Chinese Wisdom", "Chinese approach", and "World-class Military", etc. In fact, many of these terms were designed to take initiatives in building alternative discourses against existing neo-liberal international order led by the United States.

For example, the New Type of International Relationship concept includes three features of "non-conflict and non-confrontation", "mutual respect for diverse", and "win-win cooperation". Also the term 'Community of Common Prosperity' stresses the co-existence and common prosperity of all countries across the world. According to prominent scholars, these terms were designed to show its dissatisfaction

toward the current international order where small portion of Western developed countries possess exclusive power in managing international affairs. Some scholars argue that China has developed these terms in order to show that China would not follow the precedents of great powers past and present, and put efforts to create a more equitable and democratized international relations.

## **V. Findings and Assessment**

As discussed, the rapid rise of China and the growing importance of the Asian region in the world politics provide one important reason to analyze and understand the China's regional policy. The region has been always a critical strategic theater as well as a stepping stone for China to achieve its ambition to be great and strong internationally, moving beyond its current status as a regional power. However, at the same time, the growing uncertainty and complexity in Asia increasingly has made its regional strategy more and more complicated. In particular, it has been thought that the Chinese diplomacy has considerably been much more complicated and complex since the leadership transition in 2012. In this context, this chapter will summarize the findings from the above comparative analysis, and assess them in terms of the continuity and change in Chinese Asian regional policy between Hu's era and Xi's first term administration. In conclusion, based on the neo-classical realist theoretical approach that put leadership perception as a critical intervening variable in foreign policy making process, this paper suggests that the Chinese Asian regional policy has been increasingly becoming more proactive and assertive, and will continue to move toward that direction. The new 5<sup>th</sup> generation leadership implied a more increased strategic focus on the region, and showed a more unswerving stance in articulating and safeguarding its national core interests, seemingly moving away from the existing TGYH policy.

First, the perception of international situation during the first administration

of Xi was not fundamentally different from the previous regime. At least officially, several official documents and speeches given by government authorities repeatedly re-affirmed that China still perceive the “peace and development” as the dominant theme of the time. Also, it made it clear again that China would adhere to the road of peaceful development based on Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and would not seek hegemony forever. At the same time, Xi’s administration during his first term held the same view as to profound changes of the global trend toward the multi-polarity and economic globalization. They also shared that despite the overall favorable condition for continuing peaceful development, the international environment is increasingly facing more diverse and complex threats, both traditional and non-traditional. In sum, two regimes’ basic perception of the time was not fundamentally different in nature.

However, there are some minor but noticeable changes in Xi’s era as well. There were some signals that indicated the China’s growing awareness of changes in the distribution of power and its increasing discontent toward the current US-led international order, especially in economic arena. While official resources such as 18<sup>th</sup> party congress report, National Defense white papers (2013/2015) criticize the “signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionalism,” the global economy since the 2008-09 financial crisis significantly questioned the sustainability of the existing US-led global economic system, thus letting China to expand its strategic space and influence. Based on its economic might as well as the growing military capability, China under the Xi’s leadership indicated its growing confidence

and pro-activeness in both regional and international affairs. 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was probably one symbolic event in which China declared the ‘New Era’, and showed such confidence. During the report, Xi claimed, “today, we are closer, more confident, and more capable than ever before of making the goal of national rejuvenation a reality.”

Second, there are also some noticeable continuity and change aspects in terms of objectives and challenges. First, the key objectives of China’s Asian regional policy, as a part of a broader peripheral strategy, have not been changed essentially over the few decades, and will not likely to be changed in the coming few decades as well. As discussed, the following three main objectives are thought to be the core of its regional policy: i) to shape stable and peaceful peripheral environment conducive to China’s national development; ii) to effectively counter US-led efforts to contain China and wide-spread China threat theory, and thereby gradually expand its influence both in the regional and international stage; iii) lastly, using the region as a stepping stone to accomplish its ultimate vision of the rejuvenation of the great Chinese nations. Such objectives have consisted of the core part in shaping Chinese peripheral policy, and this trend is likely to be continued for the considerable time in the coming future. Nonetheless, each Chinese leadership made certain adjustments and fine-tuning in accordance to one’s own context and the over-all situation.

On the other hand, despite the generally favorable condition, both the internal and external challenges had been increasingly complicated and complex. While both leaderships needed to effectively manage deteriorating social ills mainly resulted from

the China's rapid economic growth such as unbalanced development, widening inequality, rampant corruption, and low level of social trust, they also simultaneously faced increasingly complex and uncertain international environment. Especially, since 2016, the international environment has went through drastic and significant changes stemming from influential events such as the United Kingdom's Brexit movement, Donald Trump's winning presidential election and his subsequent "America First" policies, the deployment of THAAD system in South Korea, and sixth North Korean nuclear test. A series of such events significantly transformed the international environment more uncertain and complex.

In fact, the new leader has been facing much more complicated internal and external environment than that of his predecessor. Despite some favorable conditions such as stabilization of elite politics, fruits from the state-building process, increased international status, president Xi has also faced with a more complexity and uncertainty in managing Chinese foreign affairs. Internally, the leader should effectively deal with the slowdown of its economy and other various social ills, and also fulfil the soaring nationalistic sentiment. On the other hand, Xi also needed to successfully deal with the increasing strategic pressure from the US and its allies in the region as well as the ongoing territorial/maritime disputes with its neighbors. Moreover, Xi and 5<sup>th</sup> generation Chinese leaders well understand that its increased physical status could not solely ensure its status as a great power in the region, but mental support and respect should be entailed in some ways to solidify its status and move forward to

becoming a global great power.

Fundamentally, however, China's capability and experience of managing international affairs were still somewhat limited. Although its national growth over the past few decades were unprecedented and surprising, Chinese leadership in the region could not earn enough support and respect from other regional actors. Especially, in terms of soft power, Chinese normative power has not viewed as attractive and reliable for others to depend on. Therefore, for China to truly earn the great power status and move forward, it is necessary condition for Xi to acquire regional actors' support and respect by acting responsible and providing necessary public goods in the region.

Another great challenge faced by the Xi's administration during his first term was the growing difficulties in reconciling the two important but contrasting regional policy goals. As explained above, Chinese leadership has been increasingly stressed the importance of protecting its national core interests. In particular, Xi's administration, based on increased national power and influence, has emphasized and seemingly expanded the concept of core interests more and more. On the other hand, the number one priority of the regional policy is still maintaining stable external environment favorable for its domestic development. In sum, there is an increasing challenge for the new Chinese leadership to successfully reconcile two most important foreign policy goals in the region- maintaining the regional peace and stability while not damaging its national core interests.

Last but not the least, the actual diplomatic postures and practices constitute

the most important part in analyzing changing aspect of China's Asian policy. Since late 1980, the strategic importance of the region has been stressed and the regional policy toward the region started to take concrete forms in 1990s. As a part of a broader peripheral policy in China, Asian policy has been developed as an extension of overall neighboring policy sharing fundamental aspects in terms of its basic contents and ultimate goals. In this context, this research attempted to analyze how the Chinese leadership perception has been translated into the actual regional policy and diplomatic practices, and compare what has been continued and changed from the past regime. To this end, the paper divides the China's regional posture into four parts - *good neighborly diplomacy, economic diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, and soft power diplomacy*- in order to answer the main research question. The below will briefly summarize the findings and explain some implications from the findings.

In early 2000s, Hu's administration systemized its diplomatic approach, summarized as the phrase "big powers are the key; neighbors are paramount; developing countries are the foundation; and multilateralism is an important stage" in order of diplomatic priority. According to this structure, the neighboring policy was important but still subordinated to great power diplomacy. However, having realized increasing strategic significance of the peripheral region, Hu gradually developed a more concrete concept in Chinese regional policy. Under the principle "becoming friends and partners with neighbors (与邻为善, 以邻为伴)," Hu's slogan for good neighborly policy was to "build an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighborhood

(睦邻，安临，富邻)”。 Accordingly, Hu’s administration put constant efforts in resolving territorial disputes and building strategic partnerships with neighboring countries. As a result, China under the Hu’s leadership not only could solve several ongoing territorial disputes with its neighbors including Russia and Vietnam case, but also formulate a number of strategic partnerships with regional actors, which significantly alleviate the existing tensions and widespread China threat theories.

The good neighborly diplomacy in Xi’s era even further developed its neighboring policy. Xi not only significantly increased the status of China’s periphery policy in its overall diplomacy agenda decks, but also further elaborated the regional strategies by suggesting new diplomatic ideas and pushing for the internal coordination. China held the unprecedented Work Forum on Peripheral Diplomacy in 2013, and Xi came up with the new concept of “Amity (親), Sincerity (誠), Mutual Benefit (惠), Inclusiveness (容)” as well as “New Asian Security Concept” and “Asian Consciousness” to demonstrate China’s benign intent toward the Asian region. At the same time, he also emphasized the so-called ‘Top-level Design (顶层设计)’ and ‘Bottom-line Thinking (底线思想)’ to make the policy-making process more efficient and holistic, thereby preventing potential conflicts with other neighboring countries. In sum, Xi put a greater significance on formulating regional policy and managing regional affairs in his first term.

However, despite the efforts during the Xi’s first term, Chinese relationship

with neighbors, especially with the Asian neighboring countries, ironically exacerbated. Since 2010, territorial disputes between China and other claimants in the South China and the East China Seas have intensified, and China's increasing emphasis on its national core interests made the situation even worse. Unilateral declaration of the ADIZ in the East China Sea and the creation of a new administrative body in Sansha city are some examples of Chinese assertive and unswerving diplomatic behavior. In sum, while the Asian regional policy during the Xi's period significantly elaborated and advanced, it also showed a more uncompromising and assertive behavior protecting its national core interests.

Second, in economic sphere, both leaderships significantly utilized China's economic power in its regional diplomacy. After the term 'economic diplomacy' appeared officially during the Hu's period, China has taken advantages of its massive economic prowess not only to dispel existing misgivings of neighbors toward China's rise, but also to gradually expand its influence in the region. With its opening door policy and increasing engagement in international economic affairs, Hu established a number of FTAs and increased trade volume within the region. In particular, it significantly expanded the economic interactions with ASEAN countries as well as built economic regionalisms such as ASEAN+1 and ASEAN+3.

Xi also continued his predecessor's approach of using the economic power as a main instrument in Chinese diplomacy, but significantly expanded in terms of its scope and degree. While Hu's economic diplomacy largely depended on bilateral

economic ties with counterpart, Xi emphasized both bilateral and multilateral approach in its economic diplomacy. While strengthening strategic economic ties with regional countries, Xi also actively participated in creating a broader economic multilateralism such as RCEP and FTAPP. Moreover, Chinese government under Xi's leadership attempted to create a more self-centered and inclusive international initiatives such as BRI and initiative a new movement in altering existing economic order with newly emerging markets. In this sense, China has increasingly become more proactive and assertive in managing its economic diplomacy, moving beyond long-standing self-restraint and passive approach.

Third, the multilateral diplomacy also has become one critical component of the Chinese regional policy. The 4<sup>th</sup> generation leaders emphasized the regional multilateralism in an attempt to create a positive image of China as a responsible power and mitigate pervasive China threat theory. On the other hand, it was to effectively respond to increasing strategic pressure from the United States and Japan and ensure its strategic space in the region. As a result, China during 2000s began to actively participate in regional multilateralism such as ARF, EAS, SCO, and BAF. However, the effect was rather insignificant mainly due to its preference to ASEAN-way.

The new leader also stressed the multilateral diplomacy. China during Xi's first term continued to actively participate in both existing regional and international multilateral platforms. However, Xi also made a strident effort to further develop the

existing region-based multilateralism. Xi put tremendous and constant efforts on not only initiating his signatory multilateral institutions such as BRI and AIIB, but also strengthening the existing regionalism to earn necessary supports from its neighbors. For instance, in 2014, Xi stressed that the Asian issues should be solved by the Asian countries at CICA meeting in Shanghai. This move could be interpreted as its intent to solidify regional identity and expand its strategic space against the ongoing US-led containment policy. Given the importance, multilateral diplomacy is increasingly becoming essential part in the Chinese diplomacy.

Lastly, Chinese leaderships well understand that physical power and material incentives solely could not earn much-needed supports and respects from other regional countries. So Chinese efforts on enhancing its soft power have continued since 1990s, and increasingly becoming more sophisticated. As discussed, Hu's soft power diplomacy could be divided into mainly three parts of developing China model, promoting Chinese tradition and culture, and sophisticating foreign policy. Hu also came up with the new concepts of the 'Peaceful Development' and 'Harmonious World' as a part of such efforts. The successful hosting various international events both local and national level were also part of plan to boost its soft power. The Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 was one symbolic event that gave the country a confidence regarding the future prospect of its soft power diplomacy.

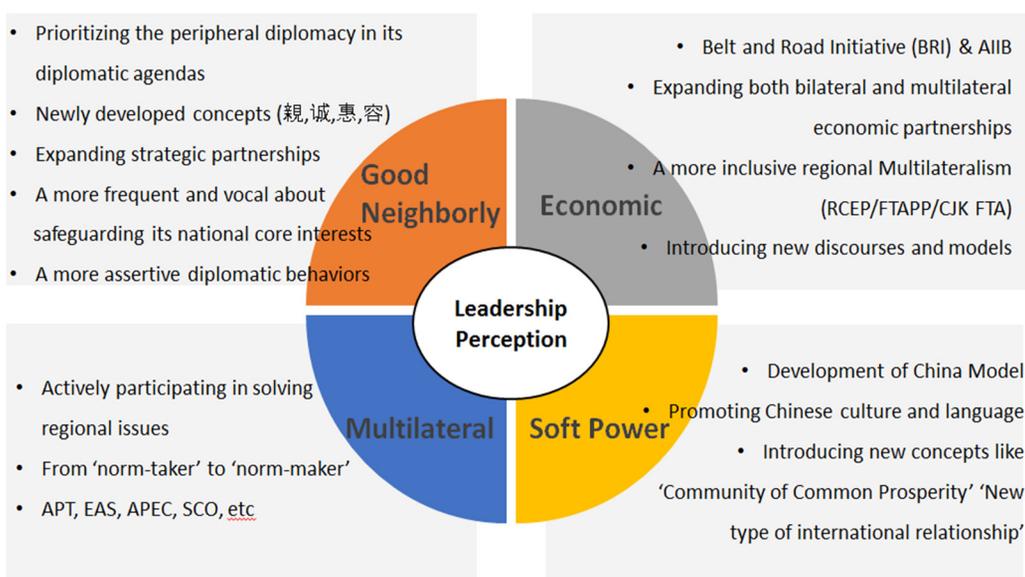
Xi also continued to stress the importance of soft power diplomacy, and put considerable efforts in creating positive image of China. However, one noticeable

change is Xi's soft power diplomacy seemingly showed more ambitious and confident stance, increasingly show its intent to shoulder more responsibility and actively play a role as a great power in international affairs with so-called the Chinese Characteristics. Several newly developed concepts such as 'New Asian Security Concept,' 'Chinese Wisdom,' 'New Type of International Relationships,' and 'Community of Common Destiny' all reflect China's strong will to expand its influence not only in the region but toward the world. In sum, Chinese soft power diplomacy was considerably expanded in terms of degree and scope with its increased international reputation and confidence.

In conclusion, there are some noticeable lessons from the overall findings and assessments of this comparative analysis. First, the Chinese leadership has increasingly emphasized the concept of national core interests, which significantly complicated its regional policy and diplomatic posture. While continuing economic development of the country still requires a stable external environment, ongoing territorial and discursive confrontations and China's uncompromising stance on its core interests make it hard for Chinese leadership to reconcile between two contradictory policy objectives. Furthermore, rather vague concept of core interests raises the likelihood of misunderstandings and future conflicts.

Second, Chinese regional policy has seemingly become more proactive and assertive based on the leadership perception changes over time. Although the official statements and documents indicate no fundamental changes in its diplomatic path and core principles, Xi's first term indicates a more ambitious and strident step toward

managing regional affairs and responding to external pressure. Moreover, it created more self-centered initiatives such as BRI and AIIB and actively participated in regional multilateralism in all aspect of economy, politics, security, and society. At the same time, Xi’s administration put efforts on establishing more holistic and integrated policy-decision in its foreign policy making process by creating measures such as ‘Top-level’ design and ‘Bottom-line Thinking’. This increasing pro-activeness in Chinese regional diplomacy indicates one noticeable change in its general diplomatic posture and strategic thinking.



(Source: author)

**[Figure 6. Increased Proactiveness and Assertiveness in China’s regional policy]**

Lastly, significantly increased status of China’s peripheral diplomacy in overall Chinese diplomacy is also noticeable. As discussed, China held the first high-

level work forum since 1949 to discuss its peripheral policy, and repeatedly emphasized the strategic importance of neighboring region. Particularly, the Asia region, a region with the highest world major power interactions, has always been China's main strategic theater. These facts imply that Chinese government is likely to put more and more diplomatic efforts and resources into the region. Also, the current on-going strategic competition with the United States in the region will likely to be more intensified in the coming years.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Given the growing strategic importance and changing regional order, Asia is increasingly becoming the significant strategic theater of China. Since late 1980s China has systemically developed the Asian regional policy not only to effectively respond to external pressure from the competitors, but also to continue its domestic development by shaping stable external environment. These main objectives of the regional strategy are still effective today. In fact, with its increased national power and international reputation, China today is growingly becoming more proactive and assertive in managing complex regional issues. China's rapidly increasing power and influence has gradually changed the leadership perception of the Chinese political elites, resulting in a more proactive and assertive foreign policy toward the region. These all provides some crucial reasons why other regional actors should discreetly pay heed to how the Chinese Asian policy will unfold in the coming decades in the process of regional order reconstruction.

However, on the other hand, Chinese regional policy is still going through the transitional and open-ended process. The future prospect of the Chinese regional policy is likely to be hinged on two critical challenges China is facing today. First, it needs to find some creative and constructive ways to reconcile between the two contrasting regional policy goals of maintaining stable external environment while protecting its core interests. At the same time, it should effectively respond to the growing pressure from the external powers while moving forward. The whole world is keenly watching

at the country whether could earn true support and respects, both from regional states and international society, by showing a consistency in its words and actual actions in the process of achieving its ultimate goal.

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## 국문 초록

지난 몇 세기 동안, 아시아 지역은 중국의 가장 핵심적인 전략적 공간으로 존재해왔다. 중국에게 아시아 지역은 외부 세력으로부터의 압력과 충격을 완화시켜주는 완충지대이자 향후 중국이 세계강대국으로 발돋움하는 데 있어 필요한 디딤돌로 여겨져 왔다. 1990년대 이래 중국의 지도자들은 본격적으로 아시아 지역의 전략적 중요성을 점차 강조해왔으며, 이에 따라 중국의 주변정책(周边政策)의 일환으로써 아시아 정책은 점진적으로 발전되어 왔다. 덩샤오핑의 도광양晦(韬光养晦)의 지침 하에 개혁기 중국은 국가 발전을 지속하기 위해 안정적이고 평화로운 외부 환경을 조성할 뿐 아니라 중국을 봉쇄하고자 하는 외부 압력에 효과적으로 대응하기 위한 주요 목표를 가지고 아시아 지역정책을 효과적으로 전개하기 위한 모든 노력을 경주해왔다. 한편, 최근 중국의 급격한 국력 신장과 역내 영향력 증대, 그리고 이로부터 기인하는 중국의 외교행태의 변화가 감지되기 시작하면서 중국의 지역 정책에도 상당한 변화가 생기고 있다는 주장이 지속적으로 제기되고 있다.

이러한 맥락에서, 본 연구는 가장 최근의 후진타오(胡锦涛) 시기와 시진핑(习近平) 시기 중국의 아시아 지역정책 비교연구를 통해 새로운 리더십 하에 중국의 지역 정책이 실질적이고 상당한 변화를 보이고 있는가에 대한 질문에 답하고자 시도한다. 계승과 변화의 양 측면이 동시에 존재하는 중국 외교의 특성 상 과거의 맥락 속에서 현재를 살펴보는 작업은 중국의 아시아 정책의 변화를 살펴보는 데 있어 필수불가결하다 할 것이다. 결론적으로, 신고전적 현실주의의 이론적 접근법과 권위있는 1차적·2차적

자료 문헌 분석을 통해, 본 연구는 시진핑 시기 중국의 지역정책이 과거에 비해 보다 주도적이고 공세적인 방향으로 변화하고 있으며, 향후 점진적으로 기존의 도광양회 정책에서 탈피하는 방향으로 전개될 것이라 예측한다. 시진핑 1기 중국의 아시아 지역정책은 여전히 지역 안정 추구하고 핵심이익 보호라는 충돌하는 정책 목표 가운데 과거에 비해 후자가 점차 강조되는 양상을 보였다. 아시아 지역질서가 급격하게 재편되는 가운데, 지역강대국으로서 중국의 대아시아 정책은 향후 지역의 평화와 번영에 있어 핵심적인 변수가 될 것으로 보인다.

**주요어:** 중국의 아시아 지역정책, 신고전적 현실주의, 후진타오, 시진핑, 지도자 인식, 공세적 외교

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