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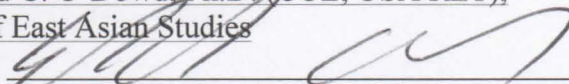
CHINA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
AND STABILIZING POLICIES FOR THE U.S. AND REGIONAL POWERS

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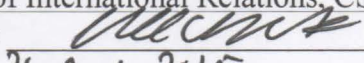
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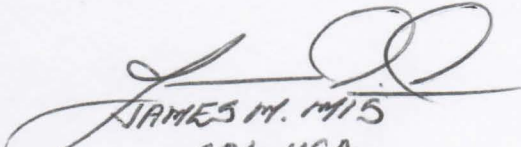
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: China's Strategic Culture in the Asia-Pacific and Stabilizing Policies for U.S. and Regional Powers

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Thesis: China's unique geography and history shape its strategic culture, which in turn influences its foreign policy objectives and behavior. Thus, to ensure a peaceful state of affairs in the Asia-Pacific, regional powers should understand China's strategic desires and fears, and socialize it into the international order.

Abstract: Asia-Pacific's importance to the world is intertwined with China's rise. With the growth of China's power and assertiveness of its actions in the region, attention has been drawn to its intentions in the global order. The analyses have generally fallen into two extremes – either fatalistic ones that predict China's intentions of hegemony and the inevitability of conflict with the US, or overly optimistic ones that echo China's official proclamations of a “peaceful rise” in a “harmonious world.” However, as this essay will argue, China has a characteristic strategic culture that is shaped by its unique history, geography, and philosophical influences. The elements include: a sense of centrality, a long perspective of time, social and political order to maintain unity of state, an aversion to foreign interference in its domestic affairs, and military strategy to build dominant political and psychological advantage. This strategic culture produces distinctive behaviors that are nuanced, constructivist, and even paradoxical to the untrained eye.

Significantly, the constructivist nature means that regional powers can socialize China into desired behavior with the aim of a peaceful and stable state of affairs. This essay will argue that ASEAN should evolve to be a more significant diplomatic weight, the US should adopt a more restrained and cooperative posture, Japan should return to sovereign ambiguity in its disputes with China, and the larger international community should socialize China and allow it to exercise co-leadership with the US in the existing world order. Understanding China's unique strategic culture, especially its strategic desires, its perception of threats, and its use of force, will mitigate the risks of strategic misperceptions, encourage cooperation and coexistence, and achieve a more stable and peaceful Asia-Pacific.

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PREFACE

Sitting alongside one of the most important trade routes in the world, Singapore has always been described as the place where the East meets the West. It is a global, cosmopolitan, and modernized city with ubiquitous Western influences; yet it is also quintessentially Asian, with Chinese, Malay, and Indian traditions, cultures, and philosophies melting in a harmonious pot. This has made Singapore an ideal place for Western and Eastern ideas to collide, and for it to act as an interlocutor for different and often conflicting worldviews.

As a Singaporean exposed to both Western and Asian perspectives my whole life, I have often observed many misconceptions from either side, and marveled at how much common ground can be found, if only we take the time to sit down and understand one another. I have found myself applying this mental model to the issue of US-China relations. I hope that my insights from studying China's strategic culture will allow a more nuanced understanding of China and create the space for compromise, cooperation, and coexistence. Peace, stability, and prosperity benefit all of us, but it will take enlightened statesmanship and deft strategic thinking from all parties to sustain them.

I would also like to thank the United States Marine Corps (USMC), especially the Marine Corps University in Quantico, for allowing me the opportunity and platform to express these thoughts. The USMC has shown its ability to be strategically and culturally sensitive, necessary for its important role in the Asia-Pacific. The guidance provided by faculty members in the University has been invaluable in that regard. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Edward C. O'Dowd, Ph.D. (COL, USA RET), Director of East Asian Studies in the University, for his unwavering mentorship, advice, and patience, without which this academic endeavor would be entirely impossible.

*Dedicated to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew (16 Sep 1923 – 23 Mar 2015).
He built a nation and influenced the world.*

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, driven by China's economic and political rise, the Asia-Pacific has become the preeminent region in the world order. It is the key engine for the global economy. The 21 economies of Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) have a combined GDP of US\$39 trillion, produce 56% of the world economic output,¹ and account for nearly half of all global trade.² Driven by economic prosperity, the region has seen accelerating defense budgets and military procurements.³ Over the last decade, Asian countries spent US\$305bn on defense, up from US\$177bn the decade before, which amounts to a 72% increase, compared to Europe's 12% increase in the same time period.⁴ In fact, in 2012, Asia's defense spending overtook Europe's for the first time.⁵ The region is also home to nine of the twenty largest metropolitan areas in the world.⁶ Within the region, the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea (SCS) are critical global trade routes, with at least 70,000 ships traveling between the Pacific and Indian Oceans each year, carrying a third of the world's seaborne oil and much of its goods.⁷

Asia-Pacific's importance to the world is intertwined with China's rise. With the growth of China's power in diplomatic, economic, and military realms, and assertiveness of its actions in the region – such as its territorial disputes with its neighbors – attention has been drawn to its intentions in the global order. The analyses have generally fallen into two extremes – either fatalistic ones that predict China's intentions of hegemony and the inevitability of conflict with the US, or overly optimistic ones that echo China's official proclamations of a “peaceful rise” in a “harmonious world.”⁸

This essay will study China's intentions and actions through the more nuanced perspective of its strategic culture, and how the international community and regional powers – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the US, and Japan – can

interact with China to maintain a stable Asia-Pacific. It will argue that China's unique geography and history shape its strategic culture, which in turn influences its foreign policy objectives and behavior. Thus, to ensure a peaceful state of affairs in the Asia-Pacific, regional powers should understand China's strategic desires and fears, and socialize it into the international order. ASEAN should evolve to be a more significant diplomatic weight, the US should adopt a more restrained and cooperative posture, Japan should return to sovereign ambiguity in its disputes with China, and the larger international community should socialize China and allow it to exercise co-leadership with the US in the existing world order. The first part of the essay will outline China's rise and assertiveness, and study these through the lenses of its strategic culture. It will then analyze China's intentions in the region, especially the conditions in which it will resort to force. With this analysis, the second part of the essay will recommend policies for ASEAN, the US, Japan, and the larger international community to ensure continued stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific.

There are a few explanations and assumptions that must accompany this essay. First, this study attempts to take a holistic view of the issue and does not seek to maximize the interests of any one country, nor does it seek to diminish the peaceful rise of China. It makes the assumption that military conflict in the long-term benefits no party in the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, the aim is continued security and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific, with the US and China able to coexist in a stable international order. While taking a holistic view of the issue, this essay will not address policy recommendations for China. The international community, led by the US, has often called on China to adjust its behavior – to respect international law and human rights, to avoid aggression and coercion, and to resolve disputes in multilateral institutions. These obvious calls have proved to be largely

ineffective and unheeded by the Chinese. By studying China's strategic culture, this essay will shed light on its resistance, and argue that the most effective method is to socialize its behavior through the policies of regional powers. The study will draw on a variety of sources, including historical events, translated texts of primary sources, and secondary sources of analysis. Last, the use of "China" as an actor assumes a largely unitary political actor with sovereign authority within and outside of Chinese territory. This is justified as China has a single-party authoritarian political system, in which the government and the political party are virtually indistinguishable.

STRATEGIC CULTURE

The concept of strategic culture requires further definition and explanation. There is a rich literature on strategic culture – such as studies by Theo Farrell, Peter Katzenstein, Jack Snyder, and Ken Booth – and they argue that culture is a critical variable affecting strategy. It influences how decision-makers think, determines rank preferences and geostrategic priorities, and constrains choices. In the application of violence, it affects how nations prepare for war, shapes war aims, and defines conditions for victory and conflict termination.⁹ This essay will adapt Michael Porter's definition of strategic culture, as an "ambiguous repertoire of competing ideas that can be selected, instrumentalized, and manipulated – instead of a clear script for action – within which strategy is made."¹⁰ This definition of strategic culture has several characteristics. First, it implies that although cultural ideas and identity matter in strategy, they are not deterministic nor should they be dogmatic. Second, as strategic culture contains semi-permanent beliefs and norms rooted in the past, it lags behind changes in environment and is not fully responsive to externalities. Last, it is a dynamic product of external reciprocal interaction and a set of internal ideas and influences, which implies that external parties can interact with one's

culture to shape its strategy.¹¹ Indeed, this approach to strategic culture is the basis for the essay's constructivist arguments and recommendations, which means that China's behavior is significantly determined by its perception of its own role and how others relate to it in the international order, and that the rest of the world can interact with China and socialize it into a desired path of peace, coexistence, and cooperation.

In this manner, the essay subscribes to the typology of cultural realism.¹² It avoids deterministic extremes of international politics when studying China – on one end, Michael Handel's argument that strategy has a global, objective logic, and on the other, what Ken Booth and Robert Kaplan argue as cultural specificity, where strategy is bounded only by cultural norms.¹³ Here, strategic culture takes into account both rational choice and distinct culture of a particular nation.¹⁴ Increasingly, this seems to be the accurate perspective from which to analyze international politics. There is an argument that in recent conflicts such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US failed to appreciate foreign societies, and thus struggled to translate tactical superiority into lasting political triumph.¹⁵ Furthermore, strategic and military actions by China, even in the modern age since 1949, have been difficult to explain using Western strategic rational thought rooted in Clausewitzian principles, which points to a unique and distinctive Chinese strategic culture.¹⁶

CHINA'S RISE AND ASSERTIVENESS

China's rise can be best quantified by the increase of its economic, military, and diplomatic power. Since Deng Xiaoping started China's economic reform and opened up to the world in the late 1970s, China's economy has grown on average 10% a year. Despite signs of slowdown, it is still projected to grow at 7% a year, compared to 2-3% annual growth a year for the US. According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2014,

China's economy surpassed the US and is now the largest in the world. Furthermore, China has generated huge surpluses which it has lent to the US to finance its national debt, deepening the economic dependence of both nations.¹⁷

The economic prosperity has allowed China to increase its military buildup and deployments. In 2013, China announced a 5.7% increase in its annual military budget to US\$119.5bn. Although this is still well short of American defense spending, China continues a trend of more than two decades of sustained annual defense spending increases. More importantly, it has invested asymmetrically against American military strength, such as anti-access / area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, counter-space weapons, and offensive cyber capabilities. China is growing its ability to project power at increasingly longer ranges, such as testing its first aircraft carrier and developing fifth-generation fighter aircraft. In October 2013, it conducted its largest open-ocean exercise to date in the Philippine Sea, involving all three of its PLA (People's Liberation Army) Navy fleets.¹⁸ Beyond the modernization and exercises, China has also become more assertive with the use of its military. It has sought to stop US Navy and Air Force platforms from operating in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), 200nm from its shoreline, which the international community considers a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Specifically, in August 2013, a Chinese fighter intercepted a US Navy P-8 maritime patrol craft 135nm off Hainan Island in a dangerous maneuver, which subsequently caused considerable tension between both countries.¹⁹

Combining economic and military strength with diplomatic craft, China has started to create its own spheres of influence in the region. With economic initiatives such as the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), the Silk Road Fund, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, all under the "One Belt, One Road" framework, China is

helping Asian nations improve infrastructure and plug into regional and global trade networks.²⁰ Furthermore, it has pushed the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) as the basis for a new security architecture in Asia.²¹ These initiatives offer alternatives to US- or Japan-sponsored architectures, drawing regional countries into China's orbit and giving it a leadership role.

China's assertiveness is most easily observed in its territorial disputes with neighboring countries in the South and East China Seas (SCS and ECS). These disputes stem from different interpretations of maritime concepts of sovereignty, territorial seas, and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). The use of the seas is ostensibly governed by international law – the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – which deals with the definition of territory, the limits of territorial sea, and the concept of EEZs.²² However, there are no clear guidelines in situations where the claims to these maritime concepts overlap, which is the case in SCS and ECS.²³

The territorial disputes in SCS revolve around three main geographical areas – the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, and Scarborough Shoal. The most contentious claim is by China, which claims almost all of the SCS with its “nine-dash line” on a historical map first published in 1935 (see Fig. 1). There has been no official explanation as to whether the nine-dash line is a claim to the land features or sea territory, or if it represents China's “traditional maritime boundary.” Regardless, China's claim does not conform to international law, although it is in the process of strengthening the legal validity.²⁴ Furthermore, China has been extremely unwilling to resolve these disputes through international courts, arbitration by a third party, or in a multilateral setting, and has insisted that its disputes be addressed bilaterally with each claimant.²⁵



Fig. 1. China's "nine-dashed line" and disputed territories in the South China Sea.
 Source: Beina Xu, "South China Sea Tensions," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified May 14, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/china/south-china-sea-tensions/p29790>.

With such a multitude of claimants and disputes, tense incidents have occurred in the congested SCS. Of recent significance, in 2012, Chinese and Filipino naval vessels were locked in a standoff in the Scarborough Shoal.²⁶ Subsequently, China has restricted Filipino vessels from entering the Shoal area.²⁷ In another incident in 2014, as China set up an oil rig in the contested waters near the Paracel Islands, Vietnamese and Chinese ships collided in a series of naval confrontations, resulting in the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat.²⁸ This subsequently led to anti-China protests in Vietnam, where Chinese nationals were targeted and had to be evacuated.²⁹ The oil rig eventually stayed in position for two months. In both incidents, although diplomatic efforts halted the escalation of tensions, China gained a slight relative advantage as a result of its actions.

The ECS tensions center around the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands which China contests with Japan. For decades, China had quietly accepted Japan's "de facto" occupation of the islands even as the two nations disputed its sovereignty.³⁰ However, in September 2012, driven by nationalistic forces, Japan's then-Prime Minister Yoshihiko

Noda nationalized the islands, upsetting the balance of ambiguous sovereignty. This exacerbated the already tense relations between Japan and China, borne out of a default state of enmity with Japan's revisionism of its WWII actions, honor of its war dead, and attempts to normalize its military posture after decades of pacifism.³¹ With the backdrop of these disagreements, in November 2013, China unilaterally and unexpectedly announced the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in ECS,³² drawing protests from the US, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, and further exacerbating tensions in the region.

No discussion of China's assertiveness can omit the issue of Taiwan. Since the Chinese Civil War in 1949, China (the People's Republic of China) considers Taiwan a renegade province, and has declared its desire to bring it under Chinese control in a "one country, two system" concept. However after the Taiwan Straits Crises in 1955, 1958, and 1996, tensions have subsided. Taiwan has refrained from making policy moves towards independence, and China has, at least temporarily, accepted the ambiguity of sovereignty. Indeed, relationships and trade links have improved, exemplified by the landmark Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) signed in 2010 to enhance cross-strait economic cooperation.³³ The US is drawn into the China-Taiwan issue with the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which obligates it to be concerned in the event of aggression and to give Taiwan the means to defend itself, but does not bind it to come to Taiwan's rescue.³⁴ This American policy has been described as "strategic ambiguity," designed to dissuade Taiwan from a unilateral declaration of independence, and to dissuade China from resorting to force to regain Taiwan.³⁵ However, with China not ruling out the use of force to retake Taiwan, the issue is still an unresolved one, and remains a possible avenue for China's assertiveness and a potential source of conflict.

CHINA'S GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

China's assertiveness can be viewed through the lenses of its strategic culture, rather than through its desire for aggressive and hegemonic domination. However, to understand China's strategic culture, one must understand the uniqueness of its geography, history, and its classical philosophical influences.

The uniqueness of China's geography lie not just in its vast landmass, of which it is only second to Russia. It is the fact that, since antiquity, it has shared long land borders with its numerous neighbors. In the modern day, it shares land borders with 14 other sovereign states – the most in the world – and has the longest land border of any country (see Fig. 2). Compounding this, it has a long coastline alongside the East and South China Seas, which extend into the Pacific. These geographical characteristics create both internal and external challenges for any Chinese sovereign, as can be seen in its history, and have ultimately shaped its strategic culture as it sought solutions to its strategic problems.



Fig. 2. Political map of modern China.

Source: Nations Online Project, "Administrative Map of People's Republic of China," last accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/china_administrative_map2.htm

China's long history, stretching from antiquity to modern times, have three distinct characteristics. First, it cycles through periods of unity and disunity, while maintaining the nature of a civilization. Its history is punctuated by civil war, interregnum and chaos. However, after each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself. This trend can be observed from the Warring States period from 475-221 B.C. and its unification under Qin Shi Huang in 221 B.C.. Thereafter, it again fractured and reunited in cycles, lasting hundreds of years.³⁶ In the late 19th century, spurred by foreign incursions, there were huge internal upheavals, such as the Muslim rebellions in the west, the Nian Rebellion of the Han Chinese, and the Christian Taiping Rebellion, with the population declining from 410 million in 1850 to 350 million in 1873.³⁷ In the modern period, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) fought bitterly between 1927 to 1949 in the Chinese Civil War to establish sovereignty in the country. Even when the latter consolidated rule under Mao Tse-tung, he led China into immense political, social, economic, and cultural upheavals with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The current generation of CCP leadership grew up in the shadow of the Maoist upheavals, and the historical trend of unity and disunity cannot be lost on them. Yet, despite these interregnums and cycles of political entities, there is a conviction in the longevity and persistence of Chinese civilization.

Second, because of its long land borders, China has always found a need to deal with the threats of numerous bordering entities, either from barbarian incursions in the past, or from conventional militaries in modern times. Non-Han tribes existed in most of China's history to the north and west, such as the Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs, and Tibetans. Even when it was conquered, such as by the Mongols in the 13th century and by the Manchus in the 17th century, the victors, in order to rule such a vast empire, had to

resort to Chinese bureaucracy, culture, and method of rule, eventually assimilating into the order they had sought to dominate, ensuring the continuation of the Chinese state and culture.³⁸ Its modern history has also been peppered with border conflicts – with India in 1962, with the Soviet Union in 1969-71, and with Vietnam in 1979.

Lastly, China was scarred by the humiliation it suffered from foreign powers in the “century of humiliation.” This “century” spanned from the 1839 Opium War with the British to the Japanese invasion of World War II which ended in 1945. Approximately a thousand unequal treaties and agreements were forced upon China, and close to 1.8 million square kilometers were taken away from Chinese territory³⁹ (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. “Map of China’s National Humiliation” (1927), Chinese University of Hong Kong. It lists 15 lost “homeland territories,” 15 lost “vassals,” 4 “territorial concessions,” and 14 lost and disputed “maritime territories.” Red notes mark treaty ports, massacres, and other political wounds.

Note that this does not include the Japanese extent of occupation in WWII.

Source: William A. Callahan, “The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China’s Geobody,” *Public Culture*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2009): 155.

The Europeans, in the era of colonialism, extracted economic concessions, demanded rights to free trade, and imposed an international order incompatible with the

Chinese conception of the world. Russia expanded on China's vast hinterland. Japan's nationalistic ambitions saw it occupy Chinese territory with the desire to replace it as the center of an East Asian international order. An incident which exemplified the "humiliation" was the Boxer Uprising in 1900: a violent and popular Chinese campaign against foreigners, especially foreign embassies, was quashed by a foreign Eight-Power allied expeditionary force, laying waste to Beijing and extracting further indemnities from China in the process.⁴⁰

The influences of Chinese classical philosophy, so distinct from the Western tradition, should also be discussed in understanding its strategic culture. Since antiquity, there have been several distinct but converging schools of classical philosophy that permeate Chinese political culture and daily life, such as Confucianism,⁴¹ Legalism, and Taoism.⁴² Since the start of CCP rule in China by Mao, despite the Cultural Revolution, Chinese classics – such as the *Analects of Confucius*, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* – have continued to influence the leading elite.⁴³ The current CCP leadership, under Xi Jinping, has revitalized the interest in Confucian thought in public spheres. He regularly quotes and exhorts its values, and is most likely using it to legitimize the CCP, justify anti-corruption policies, and inoculate the Chinese society against Western liberal ideas.⁴⁴ This is in concert with Confucius Institutes in American universities to promote Chinese culture, preaching "harmony without uniformity."⁴⁵ Confucianism is the most representative of Chinese philosophical thought. Its ideas are wide-ranging, but include the tenets of compassionate and virtuous rule, filial piety, harmony in a social hierarchy, and righteous war.⁴⁶ It has a long tradition in China's strategic culture, as it was adopted as the state philosophy from the Han dynasty onwards,

serving as its bible and constitution combined. Expertise in its tenets was a central qualification for service in China's imperial bureaucracy.⁴⁷

These philosophies have influenced Chinese strategic and military classics, best known as the *Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*.⁴⁸ The *Seven Classics* share many converging themes, and Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is the most well-known and representative. Sun Tzu emphasized the political and psychological elements over the purely military in China's strategic culture. He started off immediately with the inseparability between war and politics, writing that "warfare is the greatest affair of the state, the basis of life and death, the Way to survival or extinction."⁴⁹ He alluded to the deliberation, restraint, and moderation required in the conduct of warfare, for the survival of the state. The "Way" also points to the absorption of the Taoist canon of universal harmony.⁵⁰ Furthermore, he stressed the importance of a leader's moral influence with the masses, that "which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril."⁵¹

Sun Tzu also introduced precepts that influence strategic thought: the idea of "full and empty" – to avoid strengths and attack weaknesses, like how "flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands,"⁵² and the idea of "energy" – accumulating potential and releasing it at the right moment with overwhelming momentum against the adversary.⁵³ Specifically to stratagem, he preached victory with minimal force: "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill"; to conduct indirect warfare: "all warfare is based on deception"; all to set the conditions of achieving an inevitable political aim: "thus a victorious army wins its victory before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning."⁵⁴ In all, there is the idea of *Shih* – a Chinese abstraction of dynamic power that stems from harmony between ruler, general, and people, the

indirectness of approach, and integration of factors both human and natural. This conception of power and influence requires the study of strategy not solely focused on a few factors – the immediate threat, the visible present and immediate future – but across time from antiquity to far future, across the broad range of China’s periphery, through many conflicting interests, both internal and external, man-made and natural.⁵⁵

CHINA’S STRATEGIC CULTURE

Shaped by its unique geography, history, philosophical influences, and thoughts of its modern leaders, China’s strategic culture has five characteristics: a sense of centrality, a long perspective of time, social and political order to maintain unity of state, an aversion to foreign interference in its domestic affairs, and military strategy to build dominant political and psychological advantage.

First, China has a sense of centrality, influenced by its long history, an immutable sense of civilization, and Confucian thought applied to the world order. The conception of a nation-state in the West was constructed after centuries of history and momentous events, ranging from the Peace of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, to the balance-of-power dilemmas that brought about the two world wars and their aftermaths.⁵⁶ China did not have an equivalent historical experience, and although it is considered a nation today, it is more appropriately described as a civilization-state.⁵⁷ It sees itself as culturally superior and its rightful place as at the top of a Confucian hierarchical international system.⁵⁸ Thus, Westphalian concepts of sovereignty, legal equality, and international law do not resonate naturally with China. At the same time, its version of centrality does not have the Western notion of expansionism or exportation of its values. It desires neither the European version of colonialism, nor the American belief in the universal applicability of

its values. It is not a missionary society in the Western sense, and seeks to induce respect and deference, and at most suzerainty, but not conversion or expansion in the region.⁵⁹

This sense of centrality shapes how China behaves in the international arena. It was a major source of tension in the conflict between China and the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War. Even though the two countries shared a similar Communist ideology, the Soviets regarded the Communist world as a single entity whose leadership is in Moscow, which ran counter to China's belief in its own centrality. Evidently, China's desire for centrality overrides any ideological alignment that it might have.⁶⁰ The friction persists in the current international order. When urged to adhere and uphold the rules and responsibilities of the international system, the negative reaction of the Chinese leaders is affected by the fact that it had no say in establishing the current system – and in fact, was humiliated in the formation of it.⁶¹ Looking forward, this sense of centrality means that China expects deference from its neighbors, relates to them hierarchically in proportion to their power and significance, and aspires to take on a leadership role in the region. This explains China's assertiveness in building spheres of influences with itself taking the leadership role, displacing the US in the process. Most recently, during the APEC CEO Summit, Xi promoted the "Asia-Pacific Dream," which is China's vision for a united Asian community with itself at the center.⁶²

Second, China takes a long perspective of time, reaching back into its history for precedence, looking decades ahead in its action, and exercising strategic patience. For example, in the 1962 border conflict with India, Mao reached back into classical Chinese tradition and concluded that China and India were not doomed to perpetual enmity, and what China needed to do was to use force to knock India back to equilibrium.⁶³ In the SCS, it explains China's assertion of the nine-dash line claim, for it believes its historical

claims predate Western international law and should thus be valid.⁶⁴ It is a Chinese characteristic to use ancient precedents as a basis for strategic action.

The Chinese perspective of time stretching into the far future – and its strategic patience – can be observed in various strategies pursued in different contexts. While fighting the War of Resistance against the Japanese, Mao conceptualized the protracted strategy where China would use its advantages of vast territory, rich resources, and a large population to turn strategic weakness into superiority, and eventually to eject the Japanese over a prolonged period of time.⁶⁵ Presently, with no political cycles giving urgency to its strategic objectives, China has been patient in building its “comprehensive national power” (CNP), with officials taking the perspective that it could take around four to five decades before China becomes a developed country.⁶⁶ Furthermore, because it is patient in playing the long game, its strategy in the SCS can be observed as “salami-slicing” – the slow accumulation of small advantages, none of which cause a significant negative reaction, but add up over time to a major strategic advantage.⁶⁷ This is consistent with Taylor Fravel’s observation that China’s strategy in the SCS since the mid-90s is to delay the resolution of the disputes, consolidate its own claims, and deter other states from strengthening their own.⁶⁸ In addition, China subscribes to the idea of “Sinicization,” a process of using economic, cultural, immigration, and political influence to assimilate foreign societies. This was used to co-opt non-Han societies in the past; and in modern day, a similar process is ongoing with Taiwan and the Uighurs in Xinjiang.

Third, China treasures social and political order to maintain the unity of the country⁶⁹ and consequently the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁷⁰ As a civilization-state, the Chinese conceives the role of the state in society differently from the West.⁷¹ In Western democracies, the legitimacy of the state is derived from the democratic

processes and the executive's power always needs to be checked. However, in China, the state is the embodiment and guardian of Chinese civilization, much like the Emperor as the ruler of All-Under-Heaven. In modern day, the Chinese state is indistinguishable from the political party – the CCP. As such, the CCP derives much of its legitimacy from maintaining the unity of the country, through order and the Confucian harmony that stems from it.

The desire for social and political order stretches from the Chinese heartland to its peripheral regions. Within the heartland, China has little tolerance for dissent, for it perceives social discord to be the harbinger of disorder and disunity. As recalled by Henry Kissinger, this was the justification Deng Xiaoping gave for the military crackdown at Tiananmen in 1989: “It is very easy for chaos to come... It will not be easy to maintain order and tranquility. Had the Chinese government not taken resolute steps in Tiananmen, there would have been a civil war in China.”⁷² In dealing with the restive peripheral regions, such as against the Uighurs in Xinjiang, the Chinese state has applied both military force and “society-centric” warfare – using grassroots institutions and reshaping local society.⁷³ Since the state's role in society is to maintain unity and order, it possesses almost “infinite political will” to deal with these restive regions.⁷⁴ Similarly, the issue of Taiwan is extremely sensitive to the CCP, because it is not merely an issue of sovereignty. As a legacy of the Chinese Civil War, any legitimacy of Taiwan as a sovereign state erodes the legitimacy of the CCP, which is unacceptable to the latter.

Beyond social and political order, the CCP knows that its legitimacy also lies in improving living standards, which requires sustained economic growth.⁷⁵ Thus, China is preoccupied with related domestic concerns, such as ridding the elite of corruption, reducing inequality, uplifting the poor inland provinces, increasing standards of living and

life expectancy, and dealing with the demographic impact of the one-child policy. With legitimacy built upon economic growth, Aaron Friedberg argues that “supply disruptions and the economic dislocations... are especially troubling to [China] who [has] reason to believe they could cause major domestic unrest and even violent regime change.”⁷⁶

Internal order, unity, and legitimacy affects how China perceives its power while acting externally. To China, traditionally, the people are the source and domain of national power, and only through harmony and moral influence between ruler and people can this power be wielded.⁷⁷ Thus, internal instability may curtail China’s capacity or constrain its choices when acting externally. For instance, in analyzing China’s behavior in past territorial disputes, Fravel observes that China tended to cooperate, compromise, and make concessions when it faced internal threats to its regime security. Indeed, it appears that internal stability matters more to China than peripheral territorial sovereignty.⁷⁸ With regard to the use of military force, Chinese strategic doctrine includes the concept of “People’s War” – an idea stretching back to Mao’s political mobilization in a protracted war⁷⁹ – where the population actively supports the PLA during times of warfare in its mobilization, mobility, and combat. As such, the PLA identifies the population and local governments as vital resources, and recognizes the necessity of maintaining good relations with them.⁸⁰ Again, the unity of people and their relationship with the authority are seen as key components in the exercise of power.

Fourth, China exhibits a strong aversion to foreign interference in what it perceives as its domestic and regional affairs. This stems primarily from the “century of humiliation” in the 19th century, where European powers, Russia, and Japan inflicted military victories and extorted humiliating terms from China.⁸¹ In the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident, then-US President George Bush reflected this sentiment succinctly:

“For this understandably proud, ancient, and inward-looking people, foreign criticism was an affront, and measures taken against them a return to the coercions of the past.”⁸² Furthermore, because the CCP lacks legitimacy from popular support, it is naturally fearful of challenges to its authority and prone to exaggerate the extent of the threats, especially if they are perceived to be encouraged and supported by foreigners.⁸³ Presently, China has continued with this sensitivity on Taiwan’s sovereignty, its human rights record, and disputes in the SCS, resisting any foreign power – especially the US – from meddling in these affairs. Militarily, its buildup of A2/AD capabilities and the dangerous interception of the P-8 surveillance craft arise from this aversion to foreign interference.

Moreover, China has extended this concept of non-interference to regional affairs. While proposing for a new security architecture, Xi called for Asian problems to “be solved by Asians themselves,” and to abandon the system of alliances with external actors – specifically the US.⁸⁴ Chinese commentators often point out that alliances and overseas bases are relics of an old era, and “while they may live on for awhile longer, they will eventually go the way of the 19th century’s ‘unequal treaties.’”⁸⁵ China’s perspective is that once Asia rises and reverts to normalcy, regional countries will not permit other powers to maintain bases and military forces on their territory, and American presence and influence will consequently be reduced.⁸⁶

Lastly, China sees strategy as building a dominant political and psychological advantage. In this conception, military strategy is considered comprehensively with political and psychological aims. As a result of its unique geography and tenuous history, China subscribes to a concept of encirclement – both pursuing encirclement to advance its strategic goals, and feeling threatened when it is encircled. It attempts to prevent the formation of any anti-China coalition by exploiting the divisions amongst the members to

create a divided and compliant periphery.⁸⁷ In the 1950 Korean War, with US forces crossing the 38th parallel and the 7th Fleet positioned in the Taiwan Straits, a militarily weak China unexpectedly confronted the superior US forces because it felt menaced with encirclement on its periphery. Its calculations were not based on whether its forces could defeat the American forces, but the psychological and political impact it will create to prevent the perceived encirclement. Moreover, throughout the Cold War, China exploited hostilities between the Soviets and Americans by challenging each of them simultaneously to create geopolitical sanctuary for itself.⁸⁸ Strategic flexibility for national interest was observed at the end of the 1960s with the rapprochement with the US, despite a difference in ideology. By turning its back on the Soviets, China was essentially practicing a “reversal of alliance” illustrated in the *Romance*.⁸⁹ In 1979, China conducted a military incursion into Vietnam despite apparent Communist solidarity. This is because of Vietnam’s ambition to create an Indochinese Federation by dominating Laos and Cambodia. Together with the Soviets, this would constitute an anti-China coalition on its northern and southern borders, which was unacceptable to the Chinese. In the current SCS disputes, China has again actively tried to create a divided periphery in its insistence to only negotiate bilaterally with the ASEAN states, dividing them to achieve optimal outcomes.

Furthermore, China’s use of force is deliberate to create specific and limited outcomes. In Sun Tzu’s tradition, it is not prone to use force, and only did so when it sensed an encirclement or to arrest a negative strategic trend. This is also consistent with Fravel’s observations that in territorial disputes, China has not been prone to use force, but was likely to do so when it sensed a decline in its bargaining power and when it controlled little or none of the land that it claimed.⁹⁰ And when China decided to use force, it was

often unexpected, restrained, and calibrated. It typically involved a sudden and preemptive use of force for psychological impact, followed by an unexpected withdrawal, and a swift political resolution. It has done so even at great cost, with no territorial gains or immediate concessions by the adversary. This is the consistent trend in the conflicts of modern China: the 1950 intervention in the Korean War, the Taiwan Straits Crises of 1955 and 1958, the border conflict with India in 1962, the border conflict with Soviets in 1969-71, and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. For instance, in the 1955 Taiwan Straits Crisis, China's bombardment of Quemoy and Matsu Islands was calibrated, with the Chinese careful not to cause significant American casualties. The psychological aim, after the withdrawal of the 7th Fleet from the Straits, was to persist in its message to Taiwan of a "one China" policy but restrained in its action to prevent a "two China solution" from emerging.⁹¹ Another example was the 1962 Chinese military assault into disputed Himalayan territory in response to Indian incursions. Similarly, there were tactical restraints to avoid a larger conflict. After a phase of massive assault, the PLA stopped its advance and returned to its starting point, giving up its territorial gains. However, both the psychological impact and the political aim to stop the Indian incursions were achieved, with the territory disputed till today.⁹²

The patterns of encirclement/counter-encirclement and preemptive use of force are consistent with the concepts of "Active Defense" and "Local War" in Chinese military strategic doctrine.⁹³ Although official Chinese publications should always be read with skepticism, it is worthwhile to study the similarities in this context. Active Defense states that China's military engages in a policy of strategic defense and will only strike militarily once it has been struck. However, it adds that actions in the political and strategic realm may justify a Chinese military response. It marries a strategic defensive posture with an

offensive operational posture.⁹⁴ This is consistent with Andrew Scobell’s observation of a “Cult of Defense” in Chinese strategic culture – that China is paradoxically ready to employ military force against perceived threats while rationalizing that it is culturally averse to using force.⁹⁵ Additionally, Chinese strategic doctrine calls for the concept of “Local Wars” – geographically local wars along China’s periphery that are limited in scope, duration, and means, in pursuit of limited political goals. It adds that unlike a concept of “Total War,” in Local Wars military force aims to secure attainable and limited political goals rather than to seek the complete destruction of the enemy.⁹⁶ These concepts can be easily applied to understand China’s use of force since 1950. Hence, China’s proclaimed strategic doctrine, its historical behavior, and our analysis of its strategic culture show a remarkable consistency in when and how China will use force.

The Chinese conception of Active Defense, strategic defense with operational offense, and the willingness to use force while insisting that it is adverse to violence, may seem paradoxical or even hypocritical to an observer, but they have deep roots in Chinese philosophy. In essence, Active Defense draws from the Taoist mental model of *yin-yang* duality, where apparent contrary forces are actually complementary, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing. This duality was explicit when Mao explained the “jig-saw pattern” in the war against the Japanese, that Chinese forces had both interior and exterior lines, operated both with and without rear areas, and that it was both encircled by and counter-encircling the Japanese.⁹⁷

It is worthwhile here to contrast Chinese with Western Clausewitzian strategic thought. Both schools of thought see warfare as an instrument of politics. However, in Western Clausewitzian thought – with “war as a continuation of policy by other means”⁹⁸ – warfare is seen as a distinct phase, entered only when diplomacy and peaceful means

break down. It also alludes that war must be fought to its conclusion, for either side to suffer a military defeat, before victory and peace can ensue. This is the model for Western wars, from the Thirty Years' War to the two World Wars. However, although Chinese strategic thought distinguishes between war and politics, it sees both as inseparable. Warfare, diplomacy, and political mobilization are seen as equal parts of a holistic and comprehensive strategy. In all of China's conflicts, none were conclusive and resulted in a military victory for either side; instead, the military action served to deliver a psychological and political impact.

Consequently, influenced by Clausewitz and Jomini, Western military strategy emphasizes decisive battles to defeat the adversary's military and the primacy of maneuvers in the Napoleonic mold. In contrast, Chinese strategic thought emphasizes indirectness, deception, and asymmetric means – and not necessarily the defeat of the adversary's military – to achieve the political ends. The difference in strategic thought can be traced back to the different histories and the societal contexts in which Western and Chinese battles are fought. In the Western tradition, from the medieval feudal societies in the Thirty Years' War to the monarchs' armies in the Seven Years' War, armies were supplied by nobility and peasants, warfare was limited, and the defeat of an adversary's army usually achieves the political aim. Even with mass conscription in the Napoleonic Wars, this tradition continued. However, in Chinese history and context, with the tradition of fighting civil wars and against a multitude of adversaries, wars were deeply political, and to win decisive battles against one adversary was usually costly and did not amount to lasting political triumph. Thus in the Chinese conception, wars were meant to deliver a psychological impact and to achieve a limited political aim, rather than to be fought to its conclusion.

CHINA'S RISE: PEACEFUL OR VIOLENT?

How does this perspective of strategic culture relate to China's rise and its intentions? Will China's rise be peaceful or violent? This question usually elicits two extreme perspectives from both scholars and statesmen. On one extreme, those who study China's rise through the lens of power transition or offensive realism theories, such as A. F. K. Organski⁹⁹ or John Mearsheimer,¹⁰⁰ predict that China, when approaching parity with the dominant power in the world order, will use force to reshape the system's rules and institutions, become more belligerent, pursue expansion and regional hegemony, and be prone to armed conflict to achieve its aims. On the other extreme is China's oft-repeated official declarations of its "peaceful development" in a "harmonious world."¹⁰¹ Internally in China, the views seem to differ as well. In 2010, PLA Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu states that China's dream is to be "number one," "displacing US," and harnessing its "martial spirit" and "military rise" to amass military force sufficient to deter or defeat its adversaries.¹⁰² At around the same time in 2010, State Councilor Dai Bingguo reaffirms the official lines of "peaceful development," "refraining from seeking expansion... and claiming hegemony."¹⁰³

The careful study of China's strategic culture points to something more nuanced and constructivist. Given China's version of centrality, its strategic patience, and that its use of force is for strategic defense on its peripheral regions, China is not inclined to be belligerent, expansionist or hegemonic, but will want to seek respect and centrality. Aaron Friedberg, in his analysis of China's strategic ambitions in Asia, adds that China's definition of "preponderance" – if it can achieve it – does not entail the extension of direct physical control over large areas Asian territory (notwithstanding Taiwan) or the elimination or subjugation of other powers, but for them to accept their relative weakness

and maintain friendly relations with China. For smaller nations, China may seek deference and even alignment of their foreign and domestic policies in accordance with Chinese desires.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, the extent of China's centrality and the projection of its power will be to seek respect and deference, and at most suzerainty, but not expansion or hegemony of large parts of Asia. In a globalized and interconnected world, China will also want to play a part in shaping the international order.

Moreover, China will focus on matters related to internal stability and political legitimacy, such as the health of its economy, the resources to sustain growth, and resistance to external interference. This focus can swing either way – as a driver for China to use external threats and nationalism to bolster internal legitimacy, or as a moderating factor not to inflame tensions and to avoid costly endeavors. Its strategic culture points to the latter, with a tendency to avoid conflict and to compromise with external actors in face of internal instability, as long as they do not interfere in its internal security and politics. China's military buildup will steadily increase to commensurate with its economic rise and to safeguard itself against another “century of humiliation” by ensuring there will be no foreign incursion or interference in the future.

How will China use the military as an instrument of power, especially on its peripheral regions and in its territorial disputes? Its conception of Active Defense combines its self-identity as a benign, peaceful, and defensive power with a capacity to use force when threatened. The scope of being “threatened” is indeed expansive by Chinese definition, but it does not imply unlimited justification for unconstrained action. It is likely that it will only use force when it perceives its worst strategic fears – being encircled geopolitically by an anti-China coalition, a declining position in its territorial disputes especially in Taiwan, or intrusion and interference by foreign powers. Moreover,

when it does use force, it will be calibrated – using just-enough force to achieve specific and limited political aims. The use of force will also be sudden and unexpected to achieve a psychological advantage and swift political conclusion.

The critical implication from the study of its strategic culture is that China's strategy is malleable, and it depends heavily on China's interaction with other states. Thus, to ensure a peaceful state of affairs in the Asia-Pacific, a constructivist approach is necessary. There is scope for the US, regional powers, and the international community to shape China's role and behavior for its peaceful rise. This is what the second part of the essay will address through its policy recommendations for ASEAN, the US, Japan, and the international community.

ASEAN: TOWARDS A MORE SIGNIFICANT GEOPOLITICAL BLOC

ASEAN's institutional weakness, when faced with China's strategic culture, creates instability in the SCS. ASEAN prides itself on the ASEAN Way – a multilateral arrangement of informality, dialogue, and consensus-building.¹⁰⁵ However, this also means that ASEAN rarely takes a collective position on matters of political sensitivity, as no votes are taken, policies are adopted through consensus, and it only takes one member to veto.¹⁰⁶ Specific to the SCS disputes of sovereignty, ASEAN has preserved its neutrality.¹⁰⁷ The overlapping claims between the ASEAN states coupled with the overlapping security objectives of individual members made the policy of neutrality a natural one. As such, ASEAN's role in the SCS disputes has been limited to promote confidence-building measures and conflict management mechanisms with China. However, this is problematic as it divides ASEAN into claimants and non-claimants, preventing a creation of a collective position, and allows China to play off these differences.¹⁰⁸ In fact, ASEAN's weakness plays right into China's strategic desire of

creating a divided periphery and slowly accumulating relative advantage. Instability is created because it encourages China to advance its positions in the disputes, but when it does so, the individual ASEAN states are forced to react militarily, resulting in confrontations and the risk of conflagration. In other words, it is a failure of preventive diplomacy by ASEAN. It not only weakens the positions of the individual member states in the disputes, but leads to tensions and instability in the SCS.

ASEAN's weakness can be illustrated in two examples. First, in 2012, for the first time in its 45-year history, ASEAN failed to release a joint communiqué after the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. Although key elements of the communiqué were agreed on, Cambodia, as the rotating ASEAN chair, objected to any mention of Scarborough Shoal and any incidents with China. Cambodia, with strong economic and political ties with China, was likely acting as its diplomatic surrogate.¹⁰⁹ China was able to wield its influence to divide ASEAN, preventing it from formalizing a position, and putting a dent in its diplomatic credibility. The second example is the lack of progress in agreeing to a ASEAN-China binding Code of Conduct in the SCS. Without a collective position on the SCS disputes, ASEAN has been unable to exert enough diplomatic pressure on China, with the latter delaying the process by arguing that ASEAN is not a party to the dispute and that it will only negotiate bilaterally with the claimant states.¹¹⁰ Under the current conditions of ASEAN weakness, the prospects of agreeing on a binding Code of Conduct are likely to be "protracted if not interminable".¹¹¹

To be more effective and to ease tensions, ASEAN should evolve to carry more geopolitical weight. This can be achieved in several aspects. First, ASEAN should move away from neutrality and adopt a collective position on the territorial disputes in the SCS. This will in part prevent China from exploiting ASEAN's divisions and accumulating

further advantages. This can be done under the ambit of the ASEAN Political-Security Community, which is envisaged to come to being in 2015.¹¹² With China's conception of a hierarchical world order, it is likely to be more amenable to resolve issues with a more united and credible ASEAN. Furthermore, China is more likely to compromise or at least moderate its behavior in face of a potential counter-balancing coalition.¹¹³ However, the collective position taken by ASEAN should largely reflect the status quo of control of the islands in the SCS, for if it threatens to degrade China's position, the latter is likely to respond with escalation and force. Furthermore, ASEAN's approach should encompass more than just the thorny issues of sovereignty and sole ownership – it should also include cooperative management and joint development of resources in the SCS, and cater to China's desire for centrality by inviting it to take a central role in a multilateral cooperative maritime regime.¹¹⁴ In part countering and in part aligning with China's strategic desires, these ASEAN policies are likely to achieve mutual gain and stability in the SCS.

US POLICY IN ASIA-PACIFIC: RESTRAINT AND COOPERATION

Historically, US policy in the Asia-Pacific and towards China has been stabilizing and has resulted in the peace and prosperity of the region. However, the US is prone to episodic aberrations resulting from strategic misperceptions with China. Most recently, the “pivot to Asia,” first articulated by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011,¹¹⁵ with explicit rebalancing of military forces in the Asia-Pacific,¹¹⁶ has an overtly militaristic nature. America has increased its temporary troop deployments in Australia and South Korea, gained more access in naval bases in Singapore and Philippines, and expanded surveillance flights around China's periphery. Furthermore, in 2010, Clinton declared

American support for the negotiating positions of Vietnam and Philippines,¹¹⁷ breaking away from the policy norm of neutrality.¹¹⁸

These actions are inherently destabilizing as there is a fundamental misperception between American and Chinese strategic design. American actions, conceived as achieving deterrence and balance-of-powers to rein in perceived Chinese aggression, may be interpreted as encirclement and foreign interference by China. In response, Chinese actions conceived as defensive to preempt this encirclement, may be viewed as aggressive by the rest of the world. A vicious cycle ensues. This phenomenon was seen historically during the Korean War, and according to Kissinger, “the US and China wrestled with this dilemma repeatedly during the Cold War; to some extent they have not yet found a way to transcend it.”¹¹⁹ This misperception certainly still persists today.

To overcome the security dilemma and the resulting tensions, American policymakers will first have to accept the rise of China as a global power, but to press for it to do so within the existing international order. Contrary to the theories of power transition and offensive realism, China’s rise has not seen it upend the existing international order nor has it pursued territorial expansion.¹²⁰ Indeed, it has largely socialized into the existing order – prospering from global trade, engaging in multilateral diplomacy, and participating in UN peacekeeping efforts. The recently concluded APEC forum in Beijing and the climate change agreement between the US and China illustrate that there is latitude for cooperation, centrality, and mutual gain for both powers.¹²¹

Accordingly, the recommendation for stabilizing US policy in the Asia-Pacific is one of restraint, reassurance, and cooperation. The US should continue to maintain its long-term policy of neutrality or strategic ambiguity when it comes to the conflicting claims of sovereignty, while emphasizing the principles of multilateralism and freedom of

navigation. It should leverage its influence over ASEAN states to encourage ASEAN's evolution towards a stronger geopolitical weight. Militarily, it should quietly reassure its allies and partners in the region that the US Navy will continue to provide a counterbalance to China. Although US military presence in the region is still paramount, it should exercise restraint in its deployments and exercises, especially on China's periphery, to diminish the Chinese perception of being encircled. The US "rebalance" should exercise all instruments of power, especially diplomatic and economic initiatives, for they can build interdependence and are thus more stabilizing. The recent address by Secretary of State John Kerry on US-China relations is promising in this regard. His definition placed economic and sustainable development at the forefront of the "rebalance." Conspicuously, unlike Clinton's assertions three years ago, Kerry's address did not stress the need for stronger "bilateral security alliances" or a "broad-based military presence" in the Asia-Pacific.¹²²

The US must also recognize the fundamental tension between its liberalism and China's insistence for non-interference. US-China relations have occasionally been plagued by disagreements over human rights concerns.¹²³ China does not appreciate American interference in its domestic affairs, yet US foreign policy is influenced and bounded by domestic politics, which is imbued with idealism and the belief in the universality of American values, such as human rights. It will require deft US statesmanship to reconcile the tension – appealing to its constituents so as to maintain political support for engagement with China, yet sensitive to Chinese desire for non-interference in its domestic affairs – and to avoid the disagreement spiraling into nationalism fervor or conflict. Furthermore, as American commentators have often argued, the US has an ideological preference for democratic regimes, and is suspicious and

distrustful of a non-democratic China rising to power. For instance, Friedberg proposed that the US should continue to encourage the liberalization of China's domestic political system.¹²⁴ While democratic peace theory is valid, this cannot be bluntly applied to the US-China situation. A democratic regime is not certain to be able to rule China effectively, as it has such a vast territory, has no equivalent historical experience of Western democracy, and has always depended on strong, authoritarian rule. Like the failure of democracy to take root in the Middle East after the Arab Spring, democratic forces will likely spark China into instability, with the fear of disunity and conflagration of its restive regions. Moreover, any deliberate US effort to influence Chinese domestic politics will certainly invoke a negative reaction from China, leading to unnecessary tension or conflict. In all, an American desire for China to liberalize politically carries enormous amounts of uncertainty and risk, and it is not justifiable.

Ultimately, the sanctity of the US-China relationship must take primacy over specific issues. While competition persists in other domains, both nations must see cooperation as a conduit for a peaceful coexistence. With the proliferation of transnational threats and global issues, there is scope for the US and China to cooperate and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. This is evidenced by the landmark climate change accord recently agreed upon by both nations after nine months of negotiations, to curb carbon emissions and spur nations around the world their make their own cuts in greenhouse gases.¹²⁵ In the longer term, a sustainable solution to the division of power between the US and China could be the idea of different "spheres of influence."¹²⁶ The US would have to accept China's military edge in the maritime territories east of China with Taiwan as the boundary, so long as the US continues to have freedom of navigation and economic access, and a guarantee that countries in the region will not be coerced. The US would

maintain its leadership position in the rest of the world, its military edge up to the western Pacific, and its diplomatic and political influence in other major regions. This would certainly entail China's absorption of Taiwan and the withdrawal of American land troops in East Asia. The upside is that China's strategic fears would be decisively allayed, while vital American interests will be preserved, and the two countries could exercise their power in different spheres of influence as well as cooperatively in the wider world.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: SOCIALIZING CHINA

The broader international community also has a role to socialize China into the existing world order while allowing it to exercise the leadership it desires. China benefits and participates in the existing world order, but seeks centrality in it. The international community should give China the opportunity to shape global norms through its characteristic self-proclaimed values – such as harmony, its defensive nature, and respect for state sovereignty. Indeed, this could serve as a counterbalance to the instability often created by Western intervention.

The basic understanding that the international community must grasp is that it is unstable to have a bipolar US-China spheres of influence, underpinned by balance of power. There is structural danger if two exclusionary blocs are created, which increases the possibilities of zero-sum calculations. This is essentially the lesson that should be learned from 19th-20th century Europe, where balance-of-powers and realist considerations still led to two destructive world wars. As such, the international community should strive to build a Pacific enterprise where both the US and China are included – to allay both Chinese strategic fears that the US is trying to contain it and American strategic fears that China is trying to expel it.¹²⁷ Put simply, the international community can moderate the strategic misperceptions between the US and China by bringing them together on the same

table in multilateral engagements. Again, the recently concluded APEC summit is evidence of how stability can be created when China is socialized into the existing order and taking a lead together with the US.¹²⁸

TAIWAN AND THE SENKAKU ISLANDS: AMBIGUOUS SOVEREIGNTY

The twin issues of Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands require special treatment, for neither of them have obvious solutions nor will see resolution in the near future. For the issue of Taiwan, a non-violent reunification will involve huge political shifts in Taiwan, although China is confident that the forces of economic and cultural integration will lead to eventual political integration. The issue of the Senkaku Islands goes beyond sovereignty and involves the deep enmity and historical distrust between Japan and China. It also involves intense public opinion and it will be political suicide for either side to be perceived as compromising. Although non-violent resolution of both issues is not impossible in the long-term, it would require a unique set of conditions that is beyond the scope of this essay.

In the short- to medium-term however, to maintain stability and prevent any escalation of tension, all parties should aim for the state of ambiguous sovereignty. Taiwan should maintain its status quo, with no policy to pursue independence. The moderating influence of the US, with its One-China policy, will be crucial. Essentially, it is the principle of the Shanghai Communiqué signed in 1972, where flexibility is catered for all three parties to achieve its desires.¹²⁹ Taiwan is given the opportunity to develop itself economically; China maintains the recognition of the political connection between Taiwan and mainland China; and the US affirms its interest in peaceful resolution, one that it guarantees with the presence of the 7th Fleet. For the Senkaku Islands, to achieve the

state of ambiguous sovereignty, the suggestion has been made for the Japanese government to sell the islands to private hands while continuing to occupy it.¹³⁰

CONCLUSION

There need not be self-fulfilling fatalism in China's rise driven by theoretical paradigms, nor should it be taken for granted that its rise will be peaceful by default. Through the lenses of China's strategic culture, this essay has argued that the issue is essentially constructivist – that how China behaves will be shaped by its sense of its own role in the world order and how it interacts with regional powers. Unlike the US-Soviet relationship during the Cold War, American and Chinese perspectives and interests are not ideologically opposed and inherently irreconcilable. Although there will be disagreements, there will also be scope for compromise, cooperation, and coexistence. However, with any great power politics, the risks of strategic misperceptions and miscalculations will always exist. Understanding China's unique strategic culture, especially its strategic desires, its perception of threats, and its use of force, will mitigate these risks and build mutual understanding. With that in mind, the policies recommended for ASEAN, Japan, the US, and the broader international community will socialize China into the international order, prevent future entanglements, and achieve a more stable and peaceful Asia-Pacific.

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