

The efficiency of China's multilateral policies in East Asia (1997–2007)

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Abstract

Since the mid-1990s, China has adopted various multilateral policies to shape a more favorable regional environment. The policy of integration, which accommodates both the United States and neighboring countries' core interests, can succeed in achieving China's goals in regional multilateral cooperation. On the contrary, the policies of dominance, co-governance, and guidance have been suffering from frustration or failure because they threaten the core interests of either the United States or China's regional partners. The efficiency of China's multilateral policies is strongly shaped by two factors: the dominant United States wary of China's rapid rise and the substantial power gaps between the two states. In the coming decade, China may rise to the second rank in terms of economic capabilities, but the United States can still maintain its dominant position. So China will adhere to the policy of integration to maintain its favorable regional environment in East Asia. China's rising position and its integration policy will result in the continuation of competition in the regional cooperation mechanisms and the stability of the US regional alliance system in the decade to come.

1 Introduction

Power distribution since the end of the Cold War has been disproportionately weighted in favor of the United States, whose impact on the system is unparalleled. (Ikenberry *et al.*, 2009, pp. 6–10) Meanwhile, China has been experiencing a rise in relative power, remarkable by virtue of being the most sustained among the major powers of Japan, Germany, France, Russia, UK, and China. The dominant United States is wary of China's growing strength and exerts considerable strategic pressures through various means and channels (Sun, 2009, pp. 304–305).

To alleviate these actual and potential security pressures, China began in the mid-1990s to engage in active multilateral cooperation in East Asia to build a friendlier regional environment (Tang and Zhang, 2004; Shambaugh, 2004/2005; Glosny, 2006; Jones and Smith, 2007; Wong, 2007; Qin and Wei, 2008; Sun, 2009; Kang, 2010); but China's regional multilateral policies have not always been effective. Although certain policies, such as promoting the ASEAN-plus-China cooperation, have had their desired results, others, such as advancing the East Asian Summit on the basis of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) mechanism, have failed to accomplish their intended goals. This article will explore the causes behind the discrepant effectiveness of China's regional multilateral policies.

Although past research has addressed this question, findings have been inconclusive. Certain research argues that China's successful regional multilateral policy is subject to three factors: acceptance of open regionalism; promotion of non-traditional security cooperation; and support of ASEAN leadership within regional cooperation (Sun and Chen, 2006). This analysis, however, fails to integrate these factors into a coherent and parsimonious frame to explain the interplay between these factors. Research from the interdependence perspective argues that China's regional multilateral policy is successful as long as it does not challenge America's hegemony, but instead cultivates a complicated regional economic and security interdependence network (Pang, 2005). This analysis, however, does not specify any criterion for an interdependent arrangement or explain the relationship between it and China's regional multilateral policies.

The current analyses of the efficiency of China's regional policy are also problematic in research design and empirical verifications. First,

their research approach focuses exclusively on successful instances, taking no account of policy failures. Conclusions, therefore, are unconvincing (Sun and Chen, 2006). Second, the current research does not deliberate in detail on how to evaluate the efficiency of China's regional response to the US dominance (Sun and Lai, 2009). So I will elaborate two important points: (i) how to evaluate the success and failure of China's regional policy and (ii) how to conduct the case studies in the empirical test.

For these analytical purposes, this paper proposes an updated theoretical framework on the efficiency of China's East Asian multilateral policies in the era of 1997–2007. Waltz (2004, p. 117) argues that success is the ultimate test of policy and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state. The author applies his principle to the evaluation of China's regional multilateral policy. The policy effectiveness is divided into two levels: A. Successful: The US is neutral or supports China's regional policy; the cooperation between China and neighboring countries makes substantial progress, which reduces China's security pressure and enhances its regional influence; B. Frustrated: the United States or the neighboring countries take concrete measures to set obstacles to China's multilateral cooperation initiatives, which result in China's failure to achieve its policy goals in regional multilateral cooperation.

To ensure that this article's measures of policy effectiveness are more effective and credible than their counterparts in the existing literature, the following methods are employed: (i) Striving to use empirical evidence to demonstrate a policy's effectiveness, such as concrete diplomatic practices or policy-makers' statements; (ii) Highlighting changes in the relations among China and its neighbors in the period of 1–3 years after China's implementation of a multilateral policy, trying as much as possible to eliminate the influence of other factors.

In order to demonstrate the analytical points elaborated above, this article will investigate three cases: (i) ASEAN-Plus-China Cooperation (1997–2005); (ii) the Launch of the East Asian Summit (2004–05); (iii) Six Party Talks (2003–07). Among these cases, the case of ASEAN-Plus-China Cooperation (1997–2005) is designed to illustrate the success of China's integration policy and the case of the Launch of East Asian Summit (2004–05) is to demonstrate the frustration of China's dominance policy. Both cases focus on China's multilateral policy in the process of

East Asian cooperation, which is appropriate to control the variable of the quality of cooperation that China has been involved in.

The case of the Six Party Talks serves for the verification of the frustration of China's co-governance policy. This case also can be used for the within-case study and before–after comparisons, i.e. comparing the efficiency of China's integration policy in 2003–05 with that of its policy of co-governance in 2006–07 in the process of Six Party Talks. The before–after comparisons can make the test more convincing through controlling the related variables, such as the key issue of multilateral cooperation, the policy of third parties in the multilateral cooperation.

Hereafter, the paper is divided into six sections. The first section discusses the typology of China's multilateral policies in East Asia. The following three sections examine three cases supporting the research hypotheses. Section five develops theoretical explanations on the efficiency of China's multilateral policies against the backgrounds of the US-centered global and regional politics. The final section summarizes the research findings and their policy implications.

2 The typology of China's multilateral policies in East Asia

In this article, China's multilateral policy refers to the principles and means through which China utilizes its strategic resources to realize the objectives of its regional multilateral cooperation. China can be seen as using four different policies in its East Asian multilateral cooperation, each of which can be distinguished on the basis of the extent to which it accommodates or challenges the core interests of a dominant United States and other regional powers. These policies are: dominance, guidance, co-governance, and integration (Table 1).

The four multilateral policies can be characterized as follows:

1. *Integration*. This policy pays great respect to the core interests of the regional countries, and emphasizes that small- and medium-sized countries in the region should be involved in directing the process of regional multilateral cooperation. The strategy also attempts to identify and expand mutual interests with other countries in the region in order to promote regional integration and the smooth development of

Table 1 Typology of China's multilateral policy in East Asia

		The core interests of regional powers	
		Accommodate	Challenge
The core interests of the United States	Accommodate Challenge	Integration Guidance	Co-governance Dominance

cooperation. At the same time, it is important to note that these policy measures do not harm the core interests of the United States with respect to China's East Asian neighbors. This is the strategy used most often in practice by China in its participation in regional multilateral cooperation over the past 10 years. A classical example of this is the ASEAN 10-plus-China framework initiated and advanced by China in its policy initiatives since 1997.

2. *Co-Governance*. This policy is careful to maintain the core interests of the United States in East Asia so as to prevent it from undermining the development of regional multilateral cooperation and damaging China's national interests. However, in pursuing such a policy, China will harm the core interests of some countries in the region. Because the United States has had such limited participation in cooperative economic frameworks over the past 10 years, this strategy has been applied primarily with respect to regional security cooperation. A good example of this was China's policy in July 2006 after North Korea's successful missile test. In the framework of six-party talks, China and the United States collectively applied pressure upon North Korea, and without offering any effective security guarantees whatsoever, demanded that North Korea surrender its nuclear weapons and terminate its nuclear tests.
3. *Guidance*. This policy pays great respect to maintaining the core interests of China's neighboring countries in order to create a basis for China to guide regional multilateral cooperation in a direction that meets China's national interests. However, this policy works to restrict America from participating in some frameworks for regional cooperation, and thus poses a barrier to the maintenance and expansion of American influence in East Asia. So this policy can be seen to run against the core interests of a hegemonic United States in the region. In practice, China rarely proactively implements policies of this nature, because most regional powers

are reluctant to follow suit with China to balance against the United States.

4. *Dominance*. This policy aims to help China occupy a position from which it can direct cooperation in order to more fully realize its regional interests. Such a policy contradicts sharply with the core interests of a dominant United States and of other countries in the region. In other words, the related policy practice will challenge the core interests of the United States in East Asia, while also harming the core interests of China's neighboring countries participating in various cooperative frameworks. In practice, China has not pursued this policy for the sake of harming the interests of other states, but objectively speaking the pursuit of such a policy has created strategic conflicts and challenges. A good example of the application of this policy is China's promotion of the 10 + 3 framework as the basis for establishing the East Asian Summit in 2004–05.

3 Integration: ASEAN-Plus-China cooperation (1997–2005)

China's participation in Southeast Asian regional cooperation occurs mainly through the ASEAN-Plus-China mechanism, which has made a number of achievements since its inauguration summit. One is that of the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) launched in 2002. China also acceded to the Declaration on Conduct in the South China Sea in 2003, and at the Seventh China–ASEAN Summit the same year became the first major power to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of Southeast Asia. China and ASEAN also signed at this summit the 'Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership'. The success of this mechanism, however, is due to China's integration policy presenting no challenge to the US core interests while at the same time accommodating those of ASEAN member countries.

3.1 Accommodate the core interests of the United States in Southeast Asia

Maintaining a leading position in regional affairs constitutes America's core interest in East Asia. As stated in a US Congress report, preventing

hegemonic encroachment on Southeast Asia by any power or group of powers or attempts to exclude the US from the region are key US strategic objectives in Southeast Asia (Vaughn and Morrison, 2006; Shirk, 2010, p. 31).

American diplomacy has been committed to this goal since the end of the Cold War, a policy the United States has followed through by consistently strengthening its bilateral alliances and military presence in the region (Malik, 2006, p. 3; Green, 2010, p. 36). The United States has, since the mid-1990s, reinforced both United States–Japan and United States–Australia alliances, and done its utmost to frustrate any regional cooperation that threatens to exclude the United States. It was fierce US opposition that caused the East Asia Economic Caucus proposed by former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad to flounder at the beginning of the 1990s, and that obstructed Japan's establishment of an Asian Monetary Fund in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (Sun and Chen, 2006, p. 28).

The China-initiated ASEAN-Plus-China cooperation, however, poses no serious threat to core US Southeast Asian interests. First, the security cooperation under this framework focuses on peaceful settlement of regional conflicts and on building mutual trust – an objective more or less compatible with the US system of alliances in the region. China signed the ASEAN Code of Conduct on Disputes in the South China Sea with the aim of a peaceful settlement of South China Sea territorial disputes. China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of Southeast Asia, therefore, can be interpreted as the country's acceptance of contractual constraints upon settling disputes (Zhai, 2003, p. 36).

Second, ASEAN-Plus-China security cooperation does not diminish the central US role in the region. A review of all ASEAN–China Summit communiqués shows that the topic of military cooperation was seldom raised. As cooperation in non-traditional security issues is still nascent, political and capability problems make it difficult for ASEAN to administrate regional security, making necessary its member states' dependence on the United States in this regard (Wu, 2007, p. 48). Third, the ASEAN–China Free Trade Agreement does not exclude US trade interests. Despite the growing volume of trade among ASEAN and China, the United States is still ASEAN's biggest trade partner and investment source.

3.2 Accommodates ASEAN member countries' core interests in regional cooperation

ASEAN-led regional cooperation with greater power equilibrium characterizes the ASEAN regional cooperation strategy (Ba, 2003; Wei, 2004). ASEAN has articulated in both the ASEAN-Plus-China and ASEAN-Plus-Three mechanisms its objective of taking the leading role in multilateral cooperation. Maintaining leadership within regional cooperation, therefore, is a core ASEAN interest.

China, however, respects ASEAN leadership within the ASEAN-Plus-China mechanism. Wang Yi, then Chinese deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed on several occasions China's support of the ASEAN central role in regional cooperation. China's promise to exercise self-constraint in effecting peaceful settlement of conflicts, explicit in its acceding in November 2002 to the Declaration on Conduct in the South China Sea, substantially calmed the suspicions of ASEAN member countries (Cao and Xu, 2006, p. 143).

Moreover, China's announcement in 2003 that it would accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of Southeast Asia, and its signing of the Joint Declaration on ASEAN–China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, in which it proposed to, 'Make the ASEAN Plus Three mechanism the main channel through which to advance cooperation and regional economic integration in East Asia and Asia as a whole, to promote sustainable development and common prosperity',¹ clearly endorsed ASEAN's leading role in the region. China's unequivocal acceptance of fundamental ASEAN diplomatic principles compels other regional powers to form closer ASEAN ties, thus consolidating ASEAN leadership (Zhai, 2003, p. 36).

Another core ASEAN interest in regional cooperation is that of securing and expanding foreign trade. ASEAN member countries have an average 50% dependence on foreign trade (Wei, 2004, p. 3). The ACFTA provides opportunities for development because ASEAN member countries have greater, easier access within the ACFTA to China's large domestic market. ASEAN member countries stand to benefit from China's service sector through their preferential access to the Chinese

1 'Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the People's Republic of China on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity'. <http://www.aseansec.org/4979.htm>.

market. China's initiation of the 'Early Harvest Package' that cut tariff rates on ASEAN agricultural products also gave ASEAN member countries earlier access to the Chinese market.

China signed a free trade agreement with ASEAN in November 2004. Under the agreement, the parties started lowering or canceling tariffs on 7,000 items, with the goal of reaching full mutual free trade by 2010. On 14 January 2007, China and ASEAN signed a new trade agreement on services, considered a major step toward eventual completion of a Sino-ASEAN free trade agreement (Dumbaugh, 2008b, pp. 16–17). A significant increase is also imminent, according to the new terms, in China's imports of ASEAN raw materials and industrial components needed for its production of manufactured goods.

Largely as a result of these, China's trade with Southeast Asian nations has also been growing faster than US trade with the region. By 2007, China–ASEAN merchandise trade had grown extraordinarily from \$6 billion in 1991 to \$202.5 billion. The China–ASEAN trade volume is projected to expand to \$1.2 trillion under the FTA; this would then constitute the third largest market after NAFTA and the EU (Dumbaugh, 2008a, pp. 91–97).

The ASEAN–China FTA could offset the negative influence of China's WTO accession on investment flow (Tongzon, 2005, pp. 191–201) ASEAN–China two-way investment has expanded. By the end of June 2006, ASEAN had made a total net investment of 40 billion US dollars in China. In the opposite direction, there is also a strong growth of Chinese investment in ASEAN, which has become increasingly attractive to Chinese companies. ASEAN is now a major market for Chinese project contractors and labor services (Wen, 2006).

China's neighbors also gain benefit from the ACFTA in its having spurred other countries to set up similar preferential trade arrangements. Japan followed China's lead by proposing a similar free trade agreement with ASEAN in 2005. Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and India have also concluded FTAs with ASEAN. Except the Japan–ASEAN FTA, the other FTAs all came into force by January 2010. (Mahbubani, 2010, p. 40) China's ACFTA policy, therefore, is instrumental in drawing ASEAN member countries into economic cooperation under the ASEAN-Plus-China framework.

4 Dominance: the launch of East Asian summit (2004–05)

The inaugural East Asian Summit in December 2005 brought India, Australia, and New Zealand together with China, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN. At the 2004 ASEAN-Plus-Three Summit where the decision to hold the EAS was made, however, India, Australia, and New Zealand did not appear on the proposed membership list. China envisioned a future East Asian Community based on the ASEAN-Plus-Three states, according to an official from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²

EAS membership, however, remained a contentious issue among ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN-Plus-Three Ministerial Meeting in 2005 decided that the inaugural EAS should include countries that are not traditionally regarded as part of East Asia, namely India, Australia, and New Zealand. The EAS would be an open, inclusive, transparent, and outward-looking forum. China's endeavor to turn the original ASEAN-Plus-Three into an East Asia Summit, therefore, failed because its exclusiveness constituted a challenge to the core interests of both the United States and regional countries. The open nature of the EAS reassured Japan, some ASEAN members, and the United States that China would not be able to lead a new closed regionalism (Glosny, 2006, p. 46).

4.1 Challenge the core interests of the United States in East Asia

As earlier argued, the key strategic objectives of the United States in Southeast Asia are to prevent hegemonic encroachments on the region by any power or group of powers, and quash any attempts to exclude the United States from the region. The United States has traditionally played a central role in setting the agenda and shaping the goals for multilateral cooperation in the region through APEC, but the East Asian Summit, to which the United States has not been invited, could potentially displace APEC as the leading multilateral Asian group (Vaughn, 2005).

2 Interview with Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, June 2007.

Taking into account China's past achievements in ASEAN-Plus-China, an exclusive EAS identity would in the process give more weight to China, a scenario which flies in the face of core US interests. The United States was concerned about being excluded from an important regional institution, especially if it was one in which China was able to play more of a leadership role. So China's endeavor met strong criticism from the United States, and also opposition from within the region. Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia in particular lobbied for the expansion of the summit to include Australia, New Zealand, and India. This view was also endorsed by the United States (Malik, 2006, p. 5). Both inviters and invitees are either allies or close partners of the United States in regional affairs (Glosny, 2006, p. 47). Simply put, the outcome of the December 2005 summits was quite positive from the standpoint of the United States (Bailes and Cottey, 2006, p. 199).

4.2 Challenge neighboring countries' core interests

China's potentially preponderant influence in Asia explains why India, Australia, and New Zealand were invited to the inaugural Summit. The participation of these three countries is perceived as ensuring that ASEAN remains at the center of any emerging East Asian community (Yue and Zhai, 2004, p. 33; Malik, 2006, p. 3). It was feared that an ASEAN-Plus-Three-based EAS would threaten ASEAN's leading position in regional cooperation and weaken Japan's influence.

The ASEAN countries worried that an EAS in which China, Japan, or South Korea could be the chair and set the agenda would allow Northeast Asia to become the driver for East Asian regionalism and marginalize the ASEAN countries. More importantly, most ASEAN countries, especially Singapore and Indonesia, worried that proposals for a closed regional organization that excluded the United States and allowed China to play a formal leadership role were premature (Glosny, 2006, p. 45)

ASEAN hence clearly articulated in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the East Asian Summit, 'Participation in the East Asian Summit is based on the participation criteria established by ASEAN' (Ruan, 2007, p. 312). They include: first, participant countries must be signatories of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC); second, they must be formal ASEAN dialog partners; third, they must have substantive

cooperative relations with ASEAN. Although superficially restrictive, in specifying broader criteria, these stipulations actually encourage countries outside of the region to participate. The Summit was consequently defined as an open and inclusive ASEAN-led cooperation process. In addition, ASEAN spurned Beijing's offer to host the second summit, and decided that the EAS will be held annually alongside the ASEAN Summit in Southeast Asian countries only. This meant that ASEAN would be the hub of the EAS (Malik, 2006, p. 5).

Japan was worried about China having too much power in the EAS without a US presence to balance it. In many ways, China's offer to host the second EAS reinforced these worries. As a result of these concerns, Japan responded positively to the ASEAN policy objective, advocating a broader membership of countries with interests similar to its own, and expended large amounts of resources on making the EAS the focus of the future East Asia Community. The involvement of India, Australia, and New Zealand reassured Japan to better balance China's power and reduce China's influence in the region, which would maintain Japan's core interests in regional cooperation (Glosny, 2006, p. 46; Terada, 2006, p. 8; Wirth, 2009).

5 From Integration to co-governance: six-party talks (2003–07)

In January 2003, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Thus the second North Korea nuclear crisis broke out. In contrast to previous reluctance toward direct involvement in the crisis, China adopted a policy of positive mediation to find ways out of the crisis by harmonizing the various parties (Kang, 2010). As a result of China's diplomatic mediation, the first Six-Party Talks were held to resolve the nuclear issue in Beijing on 27 August 2003. The purpose of the six-party talks was to prevent North Korea from developing its nuclear weapons (Shen, 2006, p. 24). During the talks, North Korea did express its intention to give up its nuclear weapons program in exchange for other benefits. In *the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of Six-party Talks* on 19 September 2005, North Korea committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards; but

North Korea conducted a nuclear test in October 2006, which indicates the process has finally failed to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

5.1 Accommodate the core interests of the US in North Korea's nuclear issues

The US policy goals regarding North Korea's nuclear programs have focused primarily on deterring North Korea from developing nuclear weapons, and preventing North Korea from proliferating technology or materials related to its nuclear program to other states (Moore, 2008, p. 10). Despite its differences and disputes over a range of issues with the United States, China shares the goal of making the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free, which is the main purpose of the six-party talks (Yuan, 2006).

The six-party talks coordinated by China are an ideal approach to contain North Korea's nuclear ambitions when the United States could neither resort to force nor establish a bilateral dialog with confidence. On the one hand, the United States has made major mistakes and suffered from great failure in Iraq. Not only did it fail in a military sense, it also failed in the court of the international community and world public opinion (Chu and Lin, 2008, p. 35). Thus, Iraq is unlikely to become a model of US action toward the DPRK.

On the other hand, the United States has been reluctant to conduct bilateral talks with North Korea because of the unsuccessful efforts in the past decade. The United States talked about North Korean nuclear issues in 1993 and 1994, eventually concluding an 'Agreed Framework' in October 1994. But the agreement was broken in October 2002 when the DPRK informed the United States that it was engaged in an enriched uranium-based nuclear weapon program. Thereafter, the United States decided it would talk about the North Korean nuclear issue only in a multilateral forum (Chu and Lin, 2008, pp. 32–33). Former US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell traveled to China during late February 2003 to request that then Vice-Chairman Hu Jintao convey to North Korea the US desire for multilateral talks (Kang, 2010).

As has already occurred in the SPT process, the United States needed and wanted to talk to North Korea, but they did not have the tone, atmosphere, trust, and opportunity to do so (Chu and Lin, 2008, p. 41).

The Six-Party Talks process provides a good opportunity for the United States to engage in intensive, constructive, bilateral dialog. President George W Bush and other senior officials expressed their appreciation of China's diplomatic mediation at various times since the establishment of the six-party talks. President Bush thanked China for encouraging Pyongyang back to the talks after the missile tests in 2006. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said during a trip to Asia in November 2006 that it is an extraordinary thing for China to be now where it is (Yuan, 2006).

5.2 From accommodating to challenge North Korea's core interests

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea lost a most reliable security guarantor. In the face of tremendous external threats to its national security from the United States, North Korea's top priority is to possess nuclear weapons and acquire a nuclear deterrent capability because the greatest benefit nuclear weapons can offer a country is to protect its own national survival through deterring a potential adversary from invading (Shen, 2006, p. 23). The North Koreans may want a better relationship with the United States, but they will not give up their nuclear weapons to obtain it (Glaser, 2009, p. 9). In North Korea's eyes, it is more reliable to possess a nuclear deterrence capability than giving up the nuclear weapons programs and exchanging them for uncertain security assurances. So the Six-Party Talks process is not in line with North Korea's core interests to safeguard its national and regime security.

However, North Korea did welcome and involve itself in the Six-Party Talks at the initial phrase (2003–05). Besides the calculation of buying time through the talks to develop its nuclear weapons, North Korea was in hope of preventing the United States from launching military attacks even as the United States had toppled Saddam's regime in Iraq. In 2002, North Korea was labeled as part of the 'axis of evil' with Iraq and Iran by the United States. Although the United States clarified on multiple occasions that it was willing to use dialog to resolve the North Korea nuclear problem, military options were never taken off the table. In February 2003, the US military secretly drafted plans to destroy North Korea's nuclear capacity. On June 18, US Deputy Secretary of Defense

Paul D. Wolfowitz said to the Congress that should North Korea dare to strike South Korea or Japan, the United States would conduct a devastating military attack on the North. This was the US government's most stern warning to North Korea (Kang, 2010).

In such an uncertain situation, the six-party talks coordinated by China were an ideal platform and channel for North Korea to maintain a dialog with the United States and avoid its potential military attack, which was the most urgent and significant objective for North Korea at that time. In the process of talks in 2003–05, China had refrained from criticizing North Korea or putting the blame for North Korean nuclear issues on the United States. 'America's policies toward North Korea, this is the main problem we are facing', Ambassador Wang Yi told the press after the first round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing in August 2003 (Tkacik, 2006, p. 1). In this statement China repeatedly rejected the United States' demand to stop food and oil aid to North Korea. Besides the continuous aid to North Korea, China opposed the United States' request to submit the North Korea nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. China suggested at various times and occasions that the United Nations Security Council take a discreet attitude toward getting involved in the Korean nuclear issue while the six-party talks in Beijing achieved some progress and the parties concerned reached a certain consensus.³ In September 2005, China managed to push the Bush Administration to declare that it would respect North Korea's right to light water nuclear reactors in the Statement of Principles. All these efforts were in line with the North Korea's urgent and key interests to maintain its national and regime survival, which resulted in the relatively smooth progress of the talks in 2003–05. In other words, the success of the six-party talks in the initial phase lay in China's coordination, meeting the core interests of both North Korea and the United States.

However, the United States' financial sanctions on banks that did business with North Korea in December 2005 complicated Chinese mediating efforts. Although Chinese diplomats and academics still insisted that the US lift financial sanctions on North Korea, all of this was not enough for North Korea (Tkacik, 2006, p. 1). Pyongyang finally made declarations to boycott the Six-Party Talks and sought direct bilateral

3 'Chinese FM Spokesman on Beijing Six-Party Talks (2003-09-02)'. <http://www.chinaembassycanada.org/eng/xwdt/t37539.htm>.

dialogue with the United States. According to North Korea's understanding, the six-party talks hosted and coordinated by China not only pressured North Korea to abandon nuclear weapons but also undercut Pyongyang's chance of negotiating directly with Washington. As a result, North Korea might have perceived China as unfriendly if not a saboteur of its core national interests (Shen, 2006, p. 24). In order to express its dissatisfaction to the six-party talks and the United States' repeated refusal to bilateral talks, North Korea conducted the long-range missile tests on 5 July 2006. China was pressured to join a UN resolution condemning North Korea's missile tests. In North Korea's eyes, what China had provided to North Korea ultimately was far less in terms of military and political protection. So the North Koreans' response to the UN resolution was that neither the UN nor anyone else (i.e. China) could protect them and only the strong could defend justice in the world today where the jungle law prevails (Tkacik, 2006, p. 1).

In response to North Korea's nuclear test on 9 October 2006, the Chinese government issued the statement to express intense discontent with the nuclear tests. The statement said that the DPRK ignored universal opposition of the international community and flagrantly conducted the nuclear test. The Chinese government was resolutely opposed to it. China strongly demanded the DPRK live up to its commitment to non-nuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, stop any activity that may worsen the situation, and return to the six-party talks.⁴ China and other members of the UNSC unanimously supported a US-drafted resolution, Res. 1718, that called the test 'a clear threat to international peace', calling for an inspection of cargo bound to and from North Korea to look for weapons of mass destruction or related materials, and requesting that countries freeze funds related to North Korea's non-conventional weapons programs. Wang Guangya, then Chinese Ambassador to United Nations, declared publicly 'On this issue, everybody is unanimous ... No one is going to protect them (North Korea)' (Tkacik, 2006, p. 1).

Although China tried to eschew the even harsher unilateral actions that were being implemented by the United States and some other countries, China's resolute opposition to the North Korea nuclear test had a negative impact on China–North Korea relations and resulted in

4 'North Korea Hails Historic Nuclear Test'. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2006-10/09/content_703899.htm.

a loss of the limited leverage that China had over Pyongyang. In his October 10th press briefing, Mr Liu Jianchao, the Spokesman of Chinese Foreign Ministry, told the press in an unusually frank manner that massive differences had emerged between China and North Korea on the nuclear issue (Tkacik, 2006, p. 2). Relying on its active diplomacy to manage the crisis, China was able to bring North Korea back to the dialog table at the end of November 2005. But North Korea has demonstrated much deeper distrust toward the six-party talks and attached more importance to a direct dialogue with the United States.

After the conclusion of the last round of six-party talks in December 2006, Pyongyang was reported to have suggested the bilateral talks to the US through the so-called New York channel of diplomatic communication between the two nations.⁵ On 17–18 January 2007, North Korea and the United States held informal talks on Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program in Berlin.⁶ It is significant that the talks occurred outside of a direct round of the six-party talks. It should also be noted that the bilateral meeting occurred in Berlin, not Beijing, where the six-party talks were taking place.⁷

All these developments indicate the six-party talks hosted by China have been marginalized with the priority being North Korea and the process of persuading North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. On the one hand, North Korea does not need the six-party talks to thwart potential military actions of the United States, because the increasingly visible failure of the US in Iraq has substantially mitigated North Korea's concerns over a preventive strike by the United States. On the other hand, North Korea hoped that bilateral talks with the United States could pave the way for a more favorable atmosphere to make the international community accept its position as a new nuclear power, while China and its coordinated six-party talks could not make further contributions to satisfy this core interest of North Korea in the wake of its nuclear test.

5 'Bilateral Talks in Berlin Show Revised U.S. Stance toward N.K'. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/184955.html.

6 'US–North Korea Talks Continue in Berlin'. <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSSP22386320070118>.

7 'Bilateral Talks in Berlin Show Revised U.S. Stance toward N.K'. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/184955.html.

6 The structural constraints and the efficiency of China's multilateral policies

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has been the only superpower in the international system, while China's increasing economic capabilities result in its expanding regional influences in East Asia. The efficiency of China's multilateral policies is strongly shaped by the structural constraints, i.e. the keen wariness of a dominant United States and regional powers on China's rapid rise and the substantial power gaps between China and the United States.

6.1 *China's rise in the shadow of US dominance*

In the wake of the Cold War, the rise of China's power was the fastest and the most pronounced of the six great powers. China's share of military expenditures among the world's top seven spenders increased from 1.6% in 1989 to 7.6% in 2008, ranking second in the world. Its GDP accounted for only 2.4% of the top seven major powers in 1989. In 2007, this figure reached 9.87%, and surpassed Russia, France, Britain, and Germany. However, the gaps between Chinese and American power are still considerable (Sun, 2009, pp. 304–305). Of even greater importance, in the post Cold War era, the difference between the GDP of China and the United States has actually grown in real terms. In 1989, the difference was \$7.27 trillion, and this gradually increased to \$10.22 trillion by 2007 (Sun, 2009, p. 306).

The US dominance is the product of two factors. First, the United States enjoys a commanding preeminence in both military and economic power. After the fall of the Soviet Union, US military expenditure exceeded 60% of the top seven spenders. In terms of economic power, the US GDP exceeded 44% of the top seven major powers in the world in the past two decades. With regard to military power, the United States superiority is even more pronounced (Sun, 2009, p. 306).

Second, even in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, United States traditional allies maintained close relationships at both the global and regional levels. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, United States, and European countries have shared common interests in dealing with the legacy of the Cold War. They have made joint efforts to expand NATO to the East European countries to solidify regional stability. The Kosovo war in 1999 and the Iraq war in 2003 stimulated the EU to

establish a 60,000-man rapid reaction force and enhance its military autonomy by adopting the European Security and Defense Policy (Layne, 2006, p. 35); but NATO still plays the most crucial role in securing the EU community. It is too early to say whether the EU has total capability of self-defense, even as France, which put more emphasis on its own military independence, has announced its reintegration into all structures of the Atlantic alliance (Simons, 2009).

Since the mid-1990s, the United States–Japan alliance regained the momentum for enhancing security cooperation. In 1995, Tokyo agreed to revise guidelines for the United States–Japan alliance. The guidelines called for closer wartime coordination between Japanese and United States militaries, including the use of Japanese territory and logistical services by the United States in case of war with a third country. In 2004, Japan agreed to a 5-year plan for United States–Japan joint production of a missile defense system. In May 2006, the *United States–Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation* was released (Japan National Institute for Defense Studies, 2007, p. 216).

In addition, the importance of the United States to Southeast Asia politically and militarily remains unchanged. Most ASEAN member states share an interest in maintaining the existing regional order based on US presence. Several ASEAN countries (e.g. Singapore, Philippines, and Indonesia) still maintain a close relationship with the United States, in case of China stopping cooperation with them (Glosny, 2006, p. 29). The former Singapore Premier Lee Kuan Yew even stated publicly in October 2009 that the consensus in ASEAN is that the US remains irreplaceable in East Asia (Lee, 2009, p. 6).

6.2 Why is only the integration policy successful?

In an era in which America is preponderant, a rising China inevitably faces pressure from the dominant United States. This imposes considerable systemic constraints on China's regional multilateral policy, as China's failure to accommodate the core interests of the United States or its Asian neighbors frustrates the desired effect of its regional multilateral policies (Fig. 1)

In the scenario of integration, the United States is more likely to adopt benign neutral stances toward China's regional multilateral policy. Assuming its essential interests in East Asia are not threatened, the

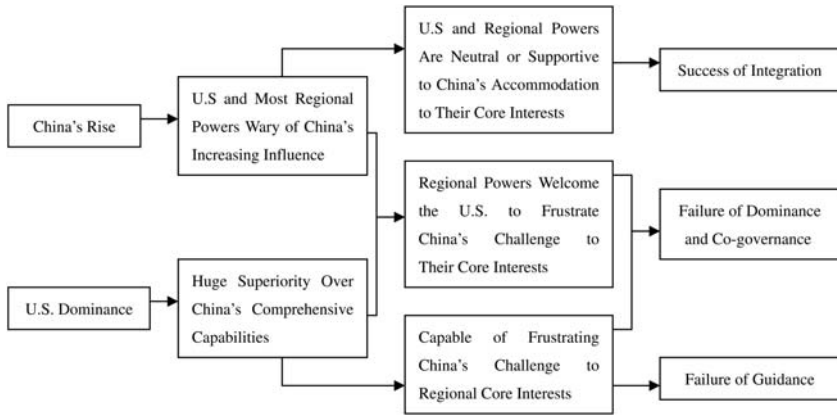


Figure 1 The structural constraints and the efficiency of China's multilateral policies in East Asia.

United States lacks the motivation to interfere in China's multilateral campaign because any indiscriminate contention with China wastes resources and thus erodes its supremacy within the power hierarchy. The regional powers are more willing to support China's multilateral policy because these initiatives facilitate the realization of their main objectives within regional multilateral cooperation. More importantly, the neutrality of the United States toward China's policy can ease the regional powers' concerns over the United States' opposition to their cooperation with China. Openly endorsed by neighboring countries and not opposed by the United States, the integration policy is therefore most likely to succeed in satisfying China's desired goals in regional multilateral cooperation.

In the scenario of co-governance, China's policies threaten the essential interests of the regional powers and they unite in protest against China. The joint efforts by the regional powers may lead the United States to take its cue to jump on the regional bandwagon of demands for a change of policy toward a balance of power with China. Under the dual pressures from the neighbors and the United States, China's policy is more likely to suffer from frustrations and even failures because of the substantial power gap between China and the United States. It is noteworthy that China's policy would be frustrated even if it challenged the interests of just one neighbor. Two dynamics are behind China's failures. First, the relevant country's uncooperative stance would, in itself, prejudice other parties' willingness to cooperate. Second, the relevant country

may solicit the actual or potential support from the United States to thwart China's efforts. For example, North Korea's demands for a bilateral dialog with the United States since its nuclear test in 2006 demonstrate its strong desire to normalize its relations with the United States and thwart China's mediation efforts in the frame of the six-party talks.

In the scenario of guidance, China's regional cooperation policies threaten the core interests of the United States in East Asia and are consequently frustrated by America's preponderance of power. In this scenario, China's neighbors may adopt a neutral stance toward China's policies even though they may suit their interests. Considering the power disparity between the US and China, the benefits of Chinese policy to regional powers would have to be enormous to compensate for the consequences of incurring US displeasure. As China's neighbors are unable to withstand the US sanctions or ostracism consequent to endorsing a Chinese policy that is detrimental to those of the United States, the regional powers choose to sit on the sidelines of Sino-US regional rivalry. This refusal-by-default frustrates China's multilateral policy because it depends on regional support. For instance, China once sought military cooperation with the Philippines, which was in both nations' interests. However, as military cooperation with China directly threatened America's essential policy of maintaining military alliances throughout Southeast Asia, the Philippines demurred.⁸

US obstruction is the explanation for China's failure in both scenarios of guidance and dominance, but the respective motivations of neighboring countries differ. In the scenario of dominance, China's policies challenge the core interests of both regional powers and the United States. The regional powers worry about China's increasing dominance in regional multilateral cooperation and so they welcome or even urge the United States to hinder China in realizing its goals to protecting their core interests within regional cooperation (Mahbubani, 2010, p. 40). As the US perception of East Asian integration focuses on China's diplomatic moves, China's relationship with other regional powers and its resultant impact on US interests is of primary concern to the United States (Ren Xiao, 2007, p. 52). So the United States is happy to adopt direct or indirect measures to coordinate with regional powers to thwart

8 Interview with analysts from China Institute of Contemporary International Relations in March, 2008.

China's multilateral initiatives. This allied pressure prevents China from achieving its policy goals in regional multilateral cooperation.

7 Conclusion

Since the mid-1990s, China has actively participated in multilateral cooperation in East Asia to alleviate security pressures resulting from its economic rise. However, America's unparalleled preponderance and China's rapid rise amid other great powers imposed considerable constraints on China's regional multilateral policies. These structural constraints frustrate China's multilateral policies of dominance, co-governance, and guidance. China only can achieve its goals in East Asian multilateral cooperation through the policy of integration, which is characterized by accommodating both the core interests of the United States in East Asia and China's neighbors. The three case studies of the ASEAN-Plus-China Cooperation (1997–2005), the launch of the East Asian Summit (2004–05), and the Six-Party Talks (2003–07) testify to and validate these findings.

If these academic findings can hold up, three policy implications can be derived for the evolution of China's multilateral policies and East Asian multilateral cooperation in the coming decade. First, China would have to adhere to the multilateral policy of integration (also see Yan, 2008, p. 164; Feng, 2009; Wang, 2010, pp. 15–16). The financial crisis starting in September 2008 has greatly enhanced China's role in both global and regional economic cooperation (Foster, 2009). In the coming decade, China may rise to be second in terms of comprehensive capabilities, but the United States can still maintain its dominant position (Yan, 2006; Ikenberry *et al.*, 2009). The United States is still the world's largest economy and the market of last resort. The US dollar would have to remain the premier international reserve currency. More important, there would have to be remarkable agreement within the region that the United States play a positive role as a security guarantor (Acharya and Goh, 2007, p. 7). Thus, China will still be confronted with enormous systemic constraints in the process of regional multilateral cooperation. The constraints will lead to China's adherence of the integration policy of accepting the dominant position of the United States and satisfying the core interests of the neighboring countries, even though China may hope to drive the regional agenda toward its own destination.

Second, the competition over the mechanisms of regional cooperation will continue. The past decade witnessed the debates and competitions in regional cooperation mechanisms among East Asian powers. These mechanisms include: ASEAN + 3 mainly advocated by China, the East Asia Summit initiated and promoted by Japan, APEC welcomed by the United States, an Asia Pacific community proposed by Australia's Prime Minister Rudd, and an East Asian Community re-emphasized by Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama in 2009. It is true that China will maximize its economic potential and become a powerhouse for the regional economic cooperation within two to three decades (Lee, 2009, p. 3), but China, sticking to following the integration policy, will be reluctant to conclude the competition among various mechanisms to shape the new architecture of regional cooperation (also see Li, 2008, pp. 297–298). Other major regional powers, like Japan, ASEAN, and Australia, may be enthusiastic about promoting their preferred mechanisms but will suffer from the lack of economic capabilities and strategic weight. It is not necessary for the United States to exert more strategic influence on East Asian regional cooperation in cases where regional powers are still competing over the frameworks and mechanisms of regional integration.

Third, the American-led hub-and-spoke alliance system in East Asia can maintain stability and continuity. The regional network of US alliances has been one of the indispensable pillars for its dominance in East Asia since the Second World War. Many analyses indicate a less rosy picture of bilateral US alliance relationships and raise real worries about the durability of these alliances (Acharya and Goh, 2007, p. 7), but in the context of China's rapid rise and the regional powers' increasing interdependence on China's market, the turbulence and collapse of the United States regional alliances system are not in line with the key interests of regional powers. The US allies, together with most other regional powers, heavily depend on the security guarantee provide by the alliance system to manage the strategic uncertainties caused by China's expanding regional and global influences. The United States also will promote the regional alliance network to play a central role in its engagement in East Asia. As a result of these efforts, the United States will maintain and even enhance its dominance in East Asia, especially in the field of traditional security in the decade to come.

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