

# Chinese Diplomacy toward Neighboring Countries

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## **Abstract**

Tensions in the Asia region have been rising in recent years with regard to territorial issues. Why have such issues become more prevalent recently, and what kinds of maritime policies is China considering? This paper will focus on such issues. China shifted its foreign policy and addressed its maritime rights in 2006. The increase in conflicts concerning maritime territorial rights from 2007 onward can also be attributed to issues with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and transitions in the United States' policies towards Asia. It has been said that China, confident from its economic growth, is shifting towards a hard-line approach to foreign policy. However, as argued in this paper, a unified Chinese maritime policy has not been established as of yet. Under these circumstances, China's policies are not decidedly rigid in nature. Rather, opinions and stances taken by government ministries and local governments vary, and so does the policy changing process for each entity differ. Regarding maritime issues, the three positions of "cooperation, participation and firm resolution" exist concurrently within today's China.

## **Keywords**

China's foreign policy, maritime policy, Japan, Philippine, Vietnam

## **Introduction**

A country's relationships with its neighboring countries are of vital significance to its national security. Of course, maintaining a peaceful environment has become an urgent task even for China, which has placed the utmost priority on economic development since it began instituting broad economic reforms.

The term "neighboring countries" possesses two geopolitical definitions in China. Countries bordering China constitute the narrowest definition, and are as a group referred to as "short-range surrounding countries." Countries from

the western part of the Persian Gulf to the eastern end of the South Pacific region comprise the group with the broadest definition, “long-range surrounding countries.” China does not have a policy category termed “Asian Regional Policy.” However, when considering that the main essence of the Asian region falls within the range of the “long-range surrounding countries” group, it is perhaps acceptable to equate Chinese diplomacy towards neighboring countries with Chinese diplomacy towards the Asia region.

By no means does China take an optimistic view of its neighboring countries and the international environment that surrounds it. Modern Chinese scholars generally summarize these complicated “surrounding environments” with the following explanation:

Within proximity to China are 6 of the world’s top 10 most populous countries, 8 of the top 25 countries with the strongest militaries, as well as 4 of the 8 countries that acknowledge that they possess nuclear weapons. In addition, 4 of the 5 most conflict-prone regions in the world (Central Asia, South Asia, the Taiwan Straits, and the Korean peninsula) are all located near China.<sup>1</sup>

Planted in the midst of this complex environment, China began to treat its surrounding area as one region. After the Tiananmen Square Incident and the end of the Cold War, it proactively engaged in constructing peaceful relations as a major pillar of its foreign policy. Twenty years have passed since the end of the Cold War, and during this time, China’s diplomacy towards its neighboring countries has been such that its own economic development consistently takes priority. However, it should also be noted that China has carried out changes in its policies to respond to changes in the international environment and in China’s own domestic situation. Accordingly, in the following chapter, this paper will divide China’s post-Cold War diplomacy towards surrounding countries into three stages, also discussing the transition processes between them.

## **1. The Shift Towards Placing Importance on Neighboring Countries (End of the Cold War ~ 1996)**

The 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident, along with the conclusion of the Cold War, exercised much influence on China’s foreign policy. After the Tiananmen

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<sup>1</sup> “After Nearly 60 Years, China to Determine Land Borders with 12 Neighboring Countries,” *Global Times*, January 6, 2009, accessed November 1, 2010, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-01-06/145516988456.shtml>.

Square Incident, China came to recognize the tension in its surrounding international atmosphere. The rapid democratization occurring in states of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe further exacerbated China's sense of threat towards its political system. It was within this difficult international environment that China came to gain a new understanding of the importance of its neighboring countries. Accordingly, it began to focus on diplomacy towards these surrounding countries as a means of escaping international isolation.

China's strategy for foreign policy immediately following the Cold War consisted of a four-pronged approach: “一圍 (diplomacy towards surrounding countries), 一列 (diplomacy towards developed countries), 一片 (diplomacy towards developing countries), and 一點 (diplomacy towards the United States).”<sup>2</sup> The fact that at this time diplomacy towards neighboring countries first became a major pillar of China's foreign policy strategy holds much significance. China's increased emphasis on the Asian region was made clear in 1997, and full-fledged developments in diplomacy with Asian countries have been visible since the start of this century. Nevertheless, the two catalysts that shaped the foundation of Chinese diplomacy towards Asia were the improvement of its relations with neighboring countries as well as the demarcation of land boundaries between China and these countries—both actively pursued from the 1990s on.

China's efforts to improve its relations with neighboring countries began in 1990, as it normalized diplomatic relations with Mongolia in May, Indonesia in August, and Singapore in October of that year. In the subsequent year, China successfully brought about the normalization of diplomatic relations with Brunei in September and Vietnam in November. Moreover, in 1992, diplomatic ties were established with South Korea.

Following the normalization of diplomatic relations, China engaged in the demarcation of its border. China's land border is 22,000 km in length, and the length of its continental territorial limits (including water) is 18,000 km. Fifteen countries share a border with China, and the number of countries in the area surrounding China amounts to 29.<sup>3</sup> Having already formed border agreements with Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Mongolia, and North Korea in the 1960s, China began to once again work on land border demarcation efforts in the 1990s after the Cold War. Through the 1990s, the Chinese government made efforts to prevent territorial issues from becoming domestic points of dispute among the public, and began its border demarcation endeavors in secret. As the research of Allen Carlson indicates, many articles in the magazine *Beijing Review* contained government

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<sup>2</sup> Aoyama Rumi, *Modern Chinese Diplomacy* (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2007): 340-342.

<sup>3</sup> The number of countries in the area surrounding China is based on a 2003 Chinese government report.

assertions on territorial issues in the 1980s, but the number of such articles from 1989 onward fell to zero.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1991, the Sino-Soviet Border Agreement was signed. Afterwards, however, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, China had to renegotiate the demarcation of 3,300 km of land borders with the former Soviet countries of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Discussions began between China and these four countries in September 1992, with border demarcation agreements settled with Kazakhstan in April 1994 (entering a supplemental agreement in 1997), Kyrgyzstan in July 1996 (entering a supplemental agreement in 1999), Tajikistan in August 1999, and Russia in 2004.

In December 1999, China and Vietnam concluded an agreement regarding land borders between the two countries. China also entered into agreements concerning its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and its maritime border along the Gulf of Tonkin in December of the following year (2000).

Due to the border demarcation work China has been tackling since the 1990s, approximately 90 percent of the 22,000 km of China's land borders have been finalized (excluding India and Bhutan, the latter of which does not share diplomatic ties with China).<sup>5</sup>

There are views that concerns about the instability of national order brought about China's cooperative stance with regards to its border demarcation efforts.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that political ties with China's neighboring countries were deepened and foreign trade rapidly expanded because of these demarcation efforts cannot be ignored. In other words, it can be said that China's diplomacy towards its neighboring countries, which began in the early 1990s, laid the foundation for political, economic, and cultural integration between China and its neighbors.

Diplomatic policies targeted at the Asian region first appeared in China's diplomatic strategy because of the Tiananmen Square Incident and the end of the Cold War. This diplomatic shift, along with the upward turn of China's relations with its neighboring countries, holds much significance. However, the diplomacy towards surrounding countries that was developed in the 1990s was still limited to states in the "short-range surrounding countries" range, while the most important issue in Chinese foreign policy at the time was ultimately that revolving around the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> China concluded agreements with regards to maintaining peace in the border regions with Bhutan in 1998 and India in 2005.

<sup>6</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 81. Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of US-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 7-45.

## **2. Full-scale Development of Diplomacy toward Surrounding Countries (1996 –2006)**

China displayed awareness of its “long-range surrounding countries” and began initiating full-scale diplomacy efforts towards them in the latter half of 1996. From 1996 through 1997, China came to actively engage in multilateral diplomacy with many countries, especially seeking cooperation with its neighboring countries within Asia. Further, at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in November 2002, Asian diplomacy was promoted as one of the most important diplomatic issues in Chinese foreign strategy.

### **International and Domestic Environmental Factors that Stimulated Proactive Diplomacy toward Surrounding Countries**

One of the principal factors that spurred China to shift its diplomatic strategy towards its neighboring countries to a more proactive and cooperative stance was the change in the international climate that arose in East Asia during the latter half of the 1990s.

From China’s perspective, the latter half of 1995 onward had seen many successive incidents that shook the foundation of relations between Japan, the United States, and China. For instance, in June 1995, then US President Bill Clinton approved an official visit to America by Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui. Also, threatening military exercises with missiles held in the Taiwan Straits by China at the time of the first Taiwanese direct presidential elections in March 1996 further served to deepen tensions between China and the United States. Moreover, on April 17, 1996, the US-Japan Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century was signed by Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. This joint declaration caused China, which had until this point approached the Japan-US security alliance calmly, to take abrupt measures toward negating this perceived growing threat.

China additionally linked the strengthening of the Japan-US security system within Asia to the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Considering these two issues together, China was greatly apprehensive regarding the formation of a containment area around the country by the United States as well as American influence on the Taiwan issue. In order to ease these fears, China decided to revise its long-standing diplomatic strategy of placing the most importance on America. Instead, China went into full-scale development of its “一圈 (surrounding countries), 一列 (developed countries), 一片 (developing countries), and 一点 (United States)” policy, which had been enacted immediately

following the Tiananmen Square Incident. For that reason, China's current foreign strategy is supported by diplomacy towards these four main categories of countries, and is thus multilateral in nature.<sup>7</sup>

After the Mischief Reef Incident and the joint declaration made at the ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Conference in early 1995, China gradually began to show interest in becoming active within a multilateral framework. However, it was from 1996-1997 that China fully implemented its diplomacy towards surrounding countries (the “一圈” portion of its multi-pronged policy), as it began to show a proactive participatory stance in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and also engaged in constructing vital and complex relations with Southeast Asian countries at a level theretofore unseen. In its March 1997 Government Work Report, China laid out a precise policy for active participation in multilateral diplomacy with regards to regional organizations while endeavoring to extinguish the perceived “China threat” felt in some foreign countries.

As for the reasons behind China's shift of focus towards Asia, the emerging trend of a Japan-US alliance clearly played a major role; however, this shift is also closely connected to numerous events through which China made progress within East Asia. For instance, the cooperative framework for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), which included China's Yunnan Province and had been initiated in 1992, took a more definite form in 1996, when six projects for the area were chosen to take priority. Thus, it is needless to say that the economic effects of this kind of tangible joint development were attractive to China. The second event through which China made progress within Asia was the increase in the number of countries becoming members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. After Vietnam's membership in 1995, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos followed in joining the organization at the end of 1996, which resulted in ASEAN becoming a “neighbor” of sorts to China. The series of regionalization trends that ASEAN and others advanced from the latter half of the 1990s thus prompted China to reconsider its strategy towards ASEAN. Accordingly, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis also caused China to exert further energy in its change in stance towards Asia.

Along with the implementation of the “一圈 (surrounding countries), 一列 (developed countries), 一片 (developing countries), and 一点 (United States)” policy, China established that it would maintain its “Priority on the Economy” policy. The Chinese government warily sensed that the international environment surrounding the country was growing relatively worse. Nevertheless, it still pressed forward with its membership in the WTO, choosing to allow China to

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<sup>7</sup> Aoyama Rumi, “The United States and Strategies toward America,” in *Governance of China: Interactive Analysis of Politics, Economy, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Ryosei Kokubun (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006): 257-270.

grow within the framework of existing international regimes, which demonstrated that China was willing to play by the rules of international society.

Such a shift to an Asia-focused strategy was further spurred by changes in China's own perception of the international situation at the time, which can be seen in its revised views concerning national security. These new views regarding national security were first referred to by Foreign Affairs Minister Qian Qichen at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 1996, and were fully presented and finalized in the April 1997 Sino-Russian Joint Statement. Also, at the July 2002 ARF Foreign Ministerial Conference, the "Position Paper Regarding Revised National Security Views" was presented.<sup>8</sup> According to Professor Akio Takahara, these revised national security views possess two aspects: those of "cooperative national security" and "comprehensive national security." In essence, the former consists of mutual trust, mutual interest, equality, and cooperation, while the latter is comprised of fighting nontraditional threats such as terrorism, drugs, infectious diseases, and pirates, along with issues concerning the economy, energy, and the environment.<sup>9</sup>

The institution of these revised views concerning national security holds importance for three reasons. Even within China, debates have been developing over whether these new concepts of security can replace the more traditional concepts of security.<sup>10</sup> Various interpretations of the revised views on national security have been brought up in Japan as well. For instance, Professor Seiichiro Takagi indicates that China's stance is to place importance on both traditional and nontraditional forms of national security.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the debate surrounding the issue, the fact that China began to focus on nontraditional national security within the institution of its revised national security views possesses important implications.

In addition, while the implementation of "cooperative national security" can be seen as an extension of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, it also contains elements consistent with the ASEAN model, such as non-usage of military force, nonintervention, and problem solving by means of holding discussions.<sup>12</sup> Such similarities provided a foundation for a cooperative

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Position Paper Regarding China's Revised Concept of Security," <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/33224.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Takahara Akio, "China's New National Security Views and Regional Policies," in *New Developments in East Asian National Security*, ed. Igarashi Akio, Sasaki Hiroshi and Takahara Akio (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2005), 194.

<sup>10</sup> Liu Shengxiang, "The End of National Security? On the New Security View," *Chinese Journal of European Studies* 22, no. 1 (2004): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defense, National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), *NIDS Security Report: China's Revised National Security Views*, by Takagi Seiichiro (Tokyo: NIDS, March 2003), 69-72.

<sup>12</sup> For research concerning the ASEAN model, see Francois Godement, "Chinese and Asian

relationship between China and ASEAN.

The adoption of these new concepts of national security is also linked to changes in perception regarding military alliances and military agreements signed between Asian countries and the United States. Such military alliances and agreements with the United States are considered to be “artifacts of the Cold War.” Up until 1999, the mainstream opinion concerning these partnerships was that the meaning for their continued existence should be called into question, as they were criticized for impeding national security cooperation among countries in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>13</sup> While these Cold War-era military alliances and agreements had become antiquated by the year 2000, the roles and characteristics of these partnerships had already begun to change. Viewpoints came to emerge asserting that it was a common understanding among the countries involved that these changes were leading towards the pursuit of shared national security.<sup>14</sup> There is also the optimistic view that, at the present time, the number of countries entered into military alliances or agreements with the United States amounts to a small minority, and countries without these kinds of partnerships actually comprise the majority.<sup>15</sup>

David Shambaugh analyzes the cause of such a change in China’s perception regarding military alliances and agreements in the following manner. He explains that China had been calling for the abandonment of Cold War-era thinking and the dissolution of alliances from that time. Responding to these actions, in 1999 the representative of the ASEAN Vision Group conveyed to China that if it refrained from demanding the dissolution of military alliances and agreements with the United States, and also from applying political pressure on its citizens living overseas concerning the issue, ASEAN would be able to construct a better relationship with China.<sup>16</sup> Whether this statement had any effect on China’s actions is unclear; however, since 2000, rhetoric from China with regards to the dissolution of alliances has decreased on paper.

China was perhaps reluctant to tone down its criticism of military agreements and alliances between the United States and Asian countries, and was likewise

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Concepts of Conflict Resolution,” in *China’s Integration in Asia: Economic Security and Strategic Issues*, ed. Robert Ash (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 246-256; Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Tang Yongsheng and Guo Xinning, “Theoretical Framework for Security in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Pacific Journal* 4 (1999): 85.

<sup>14</sup> Song Yimin, “International Relations of the Post-Cold War System and East Asia,” *Development Forum* 9 (2000): 77.

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Ning, “Three Methods of Security Cooperation in East Asia,” *World Economics and Politics* 9 (2006): 54.

<sup>16</sup> David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/05): 70.



hesitant to bring its calls for the dissolutions of said partnerships to a halt. Nevertheless, China's actions indicate that it did decide to accept such alliances and agreements as established realities. Also, it can be said that China's announcement of its revised views concerning national security shows the importance it places on "cooperative national security" and "comprehensive national security" while tolerating the traditional sense of national security as promoted by the United States.

With the structure of relations between Japan, the United States, and China changing, in addition to the growing trend towards regional cooperation within East Asia and alterations in China's domestic economic strategy in response to these occurrences, China's focus on Asia accelerated from the latter half of the 1990s. After "China Western Development" was officially decided upon as a major task during the 2000 National People's Congress in particular, China's relations with its surrounding countries became an increasingly important political issue. This importance was due not only to these countries' precious energy and natural resource supplies, but also to their potential as essential overseas markets for China. Under these circumstances, a more proactive stance towards diplomacy with surrounding countries was ratified during the 16th Party Congress, and Asian diplomacy came to be considered one of the most crucial issues within China's entire foreign strategy. In the diplomatic guidelines for the next five years adopted during the same Party Congress, the first 20 years of the 21st century are treated as a "strategic chance" for China. Reflecting this perception, a slogan was announced: "large countries are vital, neighboring countries are most important, developing countries are the foundation, and the principal stage is multilateral diplomacy."

### **Full-scale Development of Diplomacy towards Surrounding Countries**

The creation of a cooperative framework between China and the countries of Central Asia began in 1996 with the establishment of the Shanghai Five, the predecessor of the current Shanghai Cooperation Organization. China, along with Russia and three Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), were the original members of the Shanghai Five. In June 2001, the Shanghai Five's status was elevated to that of a permanent organization and renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Uzbekistan was added to the group at this time, thus increasing the organization's member country count to six. Other countries subsequently became SCO observer states, such as Mongolia in 2004 and Pakistan, Iran, and India in 2005. In 2009, Belarus and Sri Lanka joined the SCO as dialogue partners. In this manner, the participating members of the SCO expanded their influence to areas as far as the Indian Ocean and Eastern Europe.

The SCO maintains a symbolic presence, as it is a model of a China-led regional organization, which was “established by China, uses a Chinese city in its name, and has its headquarters in China.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, China uses the SCO to actively promote its closely related issues of national security and economic cooperation.

Peace along its border zones, as well as maintaining safety and stability, is a strategic national security objective for China with regards to all countries involved. However, Afghanistan, which shares a border with China, is a particularly major issue that China cannot ignore, given the need to ensure the stability of the situation in that country. Along with maintaining regional and border stability, China is also endeavoring to ensure domestic political stability through an SCO agreement that compels member countries not to support cross-border nationalist movements. For China, this concern is especially critical, due to sparks of unrest related to the Uighur issue. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization also gave China some peace of mind during the Xinjiang riots that broke out in 2009. While Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan all share borders with Xinjiang, Kazakhstan’s border with China is particularly long, spanning over 1,500 kilometers. Also, more than 300,000 Uighurs live in Kazakhstan, making the country a base for Uighur nationalist movements. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization released a statement on July 10th immediately following the Xinjiang riots in which its members proclaimed their awareness that “the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is a part of China, and what occurs in Xinjiang is a Chinese domestic issue.” The countries also made clear their intention to cooperate more on combating the three cross-border issues of terrorism, ethnic separatism, and religious extremism.<sup>18</sup>

The country most dedicated to economic cooperation among the member states of the SCO is none other than China. In 2003, China proposed a plan to the SCO that would “place priority on fields such as transportation, energy, telecommunications, agriculture, home electronics, light industry, and the spinning industry while finalizing large-scale economic and technical cooperation projects.” This plan was presented as a potential future Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between member states.<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, provisional groundwork for an FTA was laid out, with a number of economic trade agreements signed between SCO

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<sup>17</sup> Regarding the relationship between China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, see Aoyama Rumi, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China,” *Waseda Asia Review* 7 (2010): 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization, accessed November 11, 2009, <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/Yolder.asp>.

<sup>19</sup> “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member Countries’ Leadership Meeting: Unfurling the Sails of Economic Cooperation,” Xinhua News Agency, September 23, 2009, accessed November 11, 2006, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-09/23/content\\_1095882.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-09/23/content_1095882.htm).

member states, as well as the confirmation of the fields of economic cooperation and the election of model projects. Nevertheless, due to the mutual distrust and differences of opinion between member states, the goal China had first set of achieving the removal of trade barriers for goods, services, capital, and technology between the countries by the year 2020 is unlikely to be realized. Although the formation of an economic community by SCO member countries may be difficult, it is certain that economic relations between members will continue to strengthen hereafter, as evinced by the rapid increase in trade volume between them since the SCO was established. Also, in 2009, China announced that it would give a credit grant of 100 billion dollars to the SCO, which suggests that China will continue to be the driving force behind economic cooperation.

From the second half of the 1990s, China actively began to engage in the promotion of its relations with East Asian countries. Further, a joint statement titled “The Partnership of Good Neighborliness and Mutual Trust Oriented towards the 21st Century” was signed by China and ASEAN in 1997.

Then, at an informal summit meeting of the 4th ASEAN+3 conference in November 2000, China proposed numerous plans and ideas for its relationship with ASEAN. These suggestions included a potential FTA, the provision of 500 million dollars in funds to the ASEAN Cooperation Fund, joint development of the Mekong River Basin, construction of infrastructure directly connecting China and ASEAN, measures to combat HIV/AIDS, and cooperation in the technical telecommunications field. In November of the next year, the China-ASEAN Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation was adopted, and both entities agreed to commence negotiations towards the formation of a Free Trade Area between them by 2010.<sup>20</sup>

In 2002, numerous major agreements between China and ASEAN were signed. For instance, in May 2002, China presented its “Position Paper on Enhanced Cooperation in the Field of Non-Traditional Security Issues” during the ARF Senior Officials’ Meeting, in which it called for cooperation on nontraditional security issues such as terrorism, drugs, AIDS, piracy, and illegal immigration. Also, in order to work towards a peaceful resolution to issues in the South China Sea region, The ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was signed in November of the same year.

In its Government Work Report which was approved at the first meeting of the Tenth National People’s Congress in March 2003, the Chinese government pushed further forward with the Asia policies it outlined in the 16th Party Congress, clarifying its regional cooperation plan with ASEAN by stating that it would “promote the China-ASEAN FTA and strengthen cooperation with ASEAN

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<sup>20</sup> The FTA will come into effect in 2015 for countries that join ASEAN after 2010.

countries across multiple fields.” Further, the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity was submitted at the China-ASEAN Summit Meeting in August 2003, whereby China became the first country outside of the Southeast Asian region to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).

In November 2004, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao presented a nine-point proposal on strengthening the political, economic, and cultural relations between China and the countries of ASEAN.<sup>21</sup> The proposal also included strengthening cooperation on nontraditional security issues, such as maritime security. In Wen Jiabao’s proposal, he called for an early accession to the protocol of the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, the implementation of the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and early commencement of cooperation in the South China Sea. Further, he suggested that China and ASEAN follow the principle of “shelving disputes and conducting joint development” while actively searching for methods of joint development in disputed ocean areas.

Now that nearly ten years have passed since Premier Wen Jiabao’s nine-point proposal, the only point that has yet to be realized is joint development in the South China Sea. In its cooperative relations with ASEAN, China set forth policies such as the America Non-exclusion Policy and the ASEAN Leadership Role Policy. However, upon review of the processes through which regional cooperation has advanced, China’s “shadow” influence, which has been strongly promoting regional integration, stands out as an established reality.

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<sup>21</sup> Premier Wen Jiabao's nine-point proposal is as follows. (1) Strengthening of the dialogue and cooperation system at every level, including top summit exchange levels. (2) Support of the ASEAN Initiative. (3) Strengthening of cooperation on customs and quarantines, including FTAs. (4) The establishment of a China-ASEAN ministerial-level energy dialogue organization. (5) The steady implementation of transport cooperation memorandums and promotion of cooperation in the five priority areas. (6) Strengthening of cooperation in nontraditional security areas, including maritime security; early accession to the protocol of the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty; implementation of “The ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” and early commencement of cooperation in the South China Sea; following the principle of “shelving disputes and conducting joint development,” actively researching methods of joint development in disputed ocean areas; strengthening of cooperation with the eastern countries of ASEAN as well as participation as an observer state by China in ASEAN's eastern countries' growth regions. (8) Strengthening of cultural and youth exchange; signing of a cultural cooperation agreement with ASEAN; implementation of the mutual dispatching of young volunteers, development of language instruction, cooperation with medical care, and the spread of agricultural technology. (9) Enactment of commemoration activities for the 15th anniversary of a dialogue partnership between China and ASEAN in 2006, which will be known as the “Year of China-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation.” “Premier Wen Jiabao's Speech at the Eighth China-ASEAN Summit Meeting,” *Xinhua*, November 29, 2004, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2004-11/29/content\\_2274734.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2004-11/29/content_2274734.htm).

As discussed above, in response to changes in the international environment from around the year 1996, China chose to pursue growth under existing international regimes and thereby actively sought to develop a multilateral form of diplomacy. Through the strengthening of relations with the SCO and ASEAN countries, China maintained its land (railways, roads), sea and air transportation infrastructure that connects it with its neighboring countries, with which it has normalized relations.<sup>22</sup> Through these actions, China not only established “tangible” connections with South and Southeast Asia, but also began to construct political, economic, cultural, and other multilayered and multi-channel relations.

### **3. Reaffirmation of National Interests in Asia (2006 - )**

From around 2006, China redefined its meaning of national interest. As a result, China’s diplomacy towards surrounding countries also came to be modified. Since the implementation of its economic reforms, China’s national interest has constantly been focused on seeking its own economic development, and Chinese diplomatic policy was likewise defined along the lines of pursuing economic development. However, in 2006, China began to consider the new issues of national sovereignty and security as its national interests, along with the theretofore existing interest of economic development. At the August 2006 Central Meeting on Foreign Affairs Work, Chinese President Hu Jintao stated that the “role of China’s diplomacy should be to protect China’s sovereignty, security and developmental interests.”<sup>23</sup> This statement came to serve as a new slogan, “the protection of the state’s sovereignty, security, and developmental interests,” and was reaffirmed in President Hu Jintao’s Government Work Report presented in the 17th Party Congress.

In this manner, China began to bring forward the protection of national sovereignty and security as national interests alongside economic development in 2006. This objective was formed gradually through changes in circumstances both within and outside of China in 2008 and 2009, which were embodied in the actual policy. The year of the Beijing Olympics, 2008, coincided with the 30th anniversary of the implementation of China’s economic reform policies.

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<sup>22</sup> On maintaining of transportation infrastructure to Asia, see John W. Garver, “Development of China’s Overland Transportation Links with Central, Southwest, and South Asia,” *The China Quarterly* (2006): 1-22.

<sup>23</sup> “Hu Jintao’s Momentous Speech at the Central Meeting on Foreign Affairs Work in Beijing,” *Xinhua*, August 23, 2006, accessed September 1, 2006, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-08/23/content\\_4999294.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-08/23/content_4999294.htm).

Also, 2009 marked the 30th anniversary of China's normalization of relations with the United States, which was of special importance to China. However, during these two years, unforeseeable, significant incidents occurred one after the other; in order to cope with the aftermath of these incidents, China steadily made adjustments to its diplomatic policy 30 years after its economic reforms.

Both scholars and the Chinese government alike consider diplomacy in 2008 to have been "crisis diplomacy." First, China was hit by massive snowstorms during the 2008 Chinese New Year. Soon after, on the 14th of March, riots broke out in Tibet. These riots caused protests overseas that hindered China's Olympic torch relay. Two months later, on May 12th, an earthquake over magnitude 8 struck the Wenchuan area of Sichuan Province. After the closing of the Beijing Olympics, melamine was discovered mixed in powdered milk, bringing the so-called "poison milk" incident to light. This event shook Chinese society and further heightened concerns from the international community over China's food safety. Finally, the global financial crisis, which stemmed from the American subprime loan crisis, occurred in September of that year, resulting in a worldwide recession.

In 2009, a succession of sovereignty-related crises occurred, including conflicts concerning China's land and sea borders as well as ethnic issues. China's land border demarcation issues had been essentially resolved, as was discussed earlier. Nevertheless, in 2009, the border situation between China and India temporarily descended into tension as disputes regarding 90,000 square kilometers of shared border territory arose. The deadline for countries to submit territorial claims (such as exclusive economic zone claims) to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf as designated in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, known as the maritime constitution, was also in 2009, on May 13th. This law and impending deadline reignited and escalated frictions regarding maritime territorial issues, such as those in the South China Sea, between China and surrounding countries including Vietnam and the Philippines, Malaysia and Japan. Chinese scholar Wang Yizhou points out that "in recent years, there have been approximately 10 territorial areas which have led to disputes between China and its surrounding countries concerning their ownership, and in 2009 alone, conflicts manifested at various levels in 6 of those 10 areas."<sup>24</sup> Following the Tibet riots in 2008, ethnic issues in China were once again ignited in 2009 with the "7.5 Incident," which occurred in the Urumqi area of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. This 7.5 Incident was an event that thrust the national task since China's founding—"unity and stability"—before the eyes of the Chinese leadership. This incident also resulted in the partial deterioration of the environment surrounding

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<sup>24</sup> Wang Yizhou, "Ten Challenges Facing Chinese Diplomacy," *World Affairs* 10 (2010): 14-23.

China. For instance, Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey strongly criticized the event by saying that China carried out a massacre based on ethnic discrimination, and a series of protests followed in a number of countries, including Turkey.

This series of crises simultaneously brought forth confidence as well as a sense of impending disaster to China. After the global financial crisis hit, China boosted its clout and influence within the international community in a number of ways. First, China adopted a large-scale economic stimulus measure amounting to over 4 trillion yen in November 2008. Also, while maintaining an economic growth rate of over 8%, China actively took part in international conferences where response to the global financial crisis was discussed, such as the G20. Chinese government officials sum up China's proactive speech and actions regarding the financial crisis in the following manner, appealing to their country's increasing influence within the international community.

"China is aggressively advocating a reform of the global financial system, and has made steady progress in becoming a representative figure with the right to speak for developing countries...For instance, China maintained the stability of the exchange rate of the Yuan. In addition, together with active participation in trade and investment plans in the International Finance Corporation (IFC), China actively promoted the creation of a foreign exchange reserves system for the East Asian region, and also established the China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund. China also signed bilateral swap agreements with developing countries in order to further establish relations, and signed cooperation agreements for equality and mutual benefit with many Asian countries and regions, including Vietnam."<sup>25</sup>

Wang Jianmin, Vice-Director of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference as well as Director of the China Foreign Affairs University, offered the following point of view concerning China's influence at the end of 2009. "China is already at the center of the world stage. A global paradigm shift is occurring, in which the key area of the world is changing from the Atlantic to the Pacific."<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, the global financial crisis has also engendered a substantial sense of impending crisis within China's leaders. The Chinese government perceived the "3.14 Incident" in Tibet, which occurred while China was approaching the 10th anniversary of its "Western Development" strategy, as well

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<sup>25</sup> Liu Yunshan, "China's Handling of the Global Financial Crisis: Implementations and Revelations," *Qiushi* 1 (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Wu Jianmin, "The Form of a New International Structure Begins to Emerge," *World Affairs* 24 (2009): 44-46.

as the 7.5 Incident in Xinjiang, as crises. China accordingly shifted its political policy to place highest priority on the three areas of “national unity, ethnic unity, and social stability.” Many scholars have recognized the significant change in China’s national security environment after it had been exposed to harsh international criticism as a result of such ethnic conflicts. One scholar points out that “as the chance of a war in the Taiwan Straits or a conflict between China and Japan in that area has decreased greatly, all forms of pressure in China’s eastern region have gradually been alleviating. However, friction has been steadily rising in the western area”. This scholar goes on to predict that the “national security and diplomatic challenges that China confronts from now on will shift from China’s eastern region to its western region.”<sup>27</sup> Whether the focal point of China’s national security is truly moving from its eastern area to its western part remains controversial. Nevertheless, from China’s point of view, it is certain that the importance of national security in the western area grew significantly through the course of the latter half of the 2000s.

As discussed above, through a series of diplomatic crises in 2008 and 2009, China’s confidence and sense of impending crisis were both strengthened simultaneously. These two changes in awareness are closely related to the importance of national sovereignty and security to China, and resulted in the promotion of a redefinition of China’s budding national interests in 2006. In 2009, when Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi summarized China’s foreign policy for the 30th anniversary of the country’s economic reforms, he reaffirmed the objectives outlined in 2006. He stated that China’s diplomatic leadership objectives would be to seek “further protection of national sovereignty, national security, and developmental interests.”<sup>28</sup>

From the late 2000s, the fact that the two concepts of national sovereignty and security came to hold the same status as economic development demonstrates that, to China, the importance of issues pertaining to territory and security had significantly increased. In other words, the chances of China making compromises over such issues are exceedingly low. Under these circumstances, while being influenced by the series of diplomatic crises in 2008 and 2009 as well as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, maritime territorial issues, such as ethnic issues in western China and issues in the South China Sea, emerged as the core of China’s national security interests. At the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in July 2010, China came out against the internationalization of the South China Sea issues, declaring that the “South China Sea issues are topics related to China’s core interests”—to much public controversy. China’s actions

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<sup>27</sup> Wang Yizhou, *Ibid*, 14-23.

<sup>28</sup> Yang Jiechi, “Chinese Diplomacy in a Historical Period of Great Development,” *People’s Daily*, September 5, 2009.



regarding territorial disputes also came into focus during the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands issue, which occurred afterwards. As long as national sovereignty and security remain diplomatic objectives, the possibility that friction between China and its surrounding countries may escalate even further in the future, or that disputes concerning ethnic issues and maritime interests may heat up, cannot be denied. The latter set of issues, which includes debate over fishing areas, is especially significant due to the powerful influence the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea currently has over China.

Still, it is indisputable that the changes in China's stance on ethnic and territorial issues were formed on the basis of its diplomatic policies towards surrounding countries, which had been developed since the end of the Cold War. As was made clear by the above statement that "with regards to global regions of development, a paradigm shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific is occurring," the amount of weight that diplomacy towards surrounding countries bears within China's diplomatic policy as a whole is likely to grow in the future. Also, there is a strong likelihood that cooperative policies with these surrounding countries concerning political, economic, and various other areas, as well as the national security mechanisms and maintenance of the stability of the surrounding environment, will continue to be practiced.

## **Conclusion**

After the Cold War, China's diplomacy towards surrounding countries experienced vigorous development, and it is still undergoing changes. Regarding the period immediately following the conclusion of the Cold War, China placed great emphasis on the security and stability around its border areas, focusing on exchange with its neighboring countries. China steadily demarcated its land borders with surrounding countries by first restoring, or constructing anew, its diplomatic relations. Since 1996, and particularly after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, China engaged in full-scale development of its diplomacy towards surrounding countries, and began to actively take part in the creation of a cooperative and systemic framework within the Asia region. Also, since around 2006, changes in China's approach towards Asia became visible as the country began to include the protection of its national sovereignty and security along with economic development in its diplomatic policies. Even under its new diplomatic policies, the existing policy, which calls for deepening cooperative relationships with surrounding countries, continues to be practiced and no changes have been seen. At the same time, however, it is possible that frictions between China and surrounding countries could increase and even overheat in the future with regards

to issues pertaining to China's "national core interests," such as ethnic issues and maritime territorial disputes.

While China's influence is expanding due to its actively developing diplomacy towards surrounding countries, new diplomatic challenges have been emerging. As the reformation of national security-related issues and inter-country unification into a regional community has been relatively delayed, the weaknesses of a regional unification led by economic development are becoming exposed. For instance, regarding territorial disputes, the actions of China, a major regional power, have influence on Asia's national security environment. Also, the strengthening of economic relations with surrounding countries has a serious impact on China's nation-state building. In the midst of the East Turkestan independence movement in Xinjiang, Yunnan Province, which involves 16 different minority groups, in addition to other open western border issues, China possesses a strong awareness of crisis about itself and about whether it can maintain its unifying power and influence in the area.

Furthermore, nontraditional national security issues are surfacing as new areas of dispute. Surrounding countries serve as a vital market for China, and China also considers them to be important areas for investment. However, China is also seeking a policy what would allow it to prevent a "New China Threat" ideology from taking hold in neighboring states, and is searching for a way to reduce opposition to Chinese people and the infusion of Chinese capital into their countries.<sup>29</sup> Also, many of the major rivers in Asia originate in China, so it is no exaggeration to say that the creation of cooperative regional frameworks to avoid conflict over water resources is largely controlled by China's actions.<sup>30</sup>

Borders that had been blocked during the Cold War were once again reopened, ushering in a new era of cooperative relations within Asia. The progression from pluralistic, multilayered cooperative relations towards an institutionalized integration wherein the entirety of Asia can become amplified, in addition to the construction of a societal community featuring a bottom-up, self-reliant network that provides political and economic support, are likely to become vital points in the future for conceptualizing Asian regional cooperation and integration. Under these circumstances, along with the increase of China's clout within the international community, China's foreign policies began to influence the region of Asia as well as the overall peace and stability of the international social order.

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, in the case of Chinese immigrating to Russia, see Mikhail A. Alexseev and C. Richard Hofstetter, "Russia, China, and the Immigration Security Dilemma," *Political Science Quarterly* 121, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 1-32.

<sup>30</sup> For more information on regional cooperation regarding water resources in Nujiang and the Mekong River, see Aoyama Rumi, "Domestic Public Opinion, Nationalism, and International Cooperation," *Monthly Journal of Chinese Affairs* (November 2010).

During its 30 years of economic reform, China's foreign policies have consistently held to the basic principles of "peace, development and cooperation"; however, the actual diplomatic policies were continuously undergoing changes. In this sense, it can be said that the simultaneous achievement of the three national interests of national security, sovereignty, and economic development, which were formed after 2006 as diplomatic policy objectives towards surrounding countries, could exercise substantial influence on not just China's stability and development, but also world affairs as a whole.

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