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## **CHINA'S GEOPOLITICAL DESIGN FOR EAST ASIA: TAIWANESE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE\*\***

### **Resume**

China's foreign and security policy preferences for East Asia are a multifaceted issue, with Taiwan playing a crucial role in this strategic puzzle. Beijing's claim over Taiwan as its integral part is a key component of its geopolitical strategy in East Asia and an important constituent of regional security dynamics. This paper aims to delve into China's patterns of such geopolitical design for East Asia, paying particular attention on Taiwan's place within the newly introduced Indo-Pacific and attempts at multilateral alignments in the region. Author offers arguments for China's East Asian "regionally tailored" policy and discusses potential strategic options ahead of Chinese leadership regarding US-led attempts to contain China geopolitically and militarily. In addition, the paper explores some Beijing's concrete military and foreign policy responses, including its military policy over the East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone and consequences derived from recently adopted strategy titled Taiwan Issue and China's Unification in the New Era. Given Taiwan's pivotal geopolitical position in China's security policy, the paper assumes it will be one of the principal sites where the contest for the emerging world order will be waged between China and the United States. China's rise

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in the international system and the current politico-security tensions in the East Asian region as examples to argue that certain theoretical approaches, like the liberal Hegemonic Stability Theory, may no longer hold true. It is because international system is moving towards institutional separation into parallel entities, which could be a significant shift from the system that emerged after the Second World War.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, China's security policy, East Asian security, geopolitical design, Hegemonic Stability Theory

## DEBATING CHINA'S STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS IN THE NEW POLITICAL CONSTRUCT OF INDO-PACIFIC

China's geopolitical design for East Asia is a complex and multi-layered, with Taiwan occupying a crucial position in this strategic puzzle. Such a claim constitutes the key issue of its strategic choices and alternatives. The Republic of China (ROC), also known as Taiwan, has been a source of tension between the People's Republic of China<sup>1</sup> and its neighbouring countries for many decades. In addition to oppress potential containment from the West, China's claim over Taiwan as an integral part of its territory constitutes a central component of its geopolitical strategy for East Asia. Inconsistency of some theoretical approaches (dominantly realist ones) and the latest intensifying occurrences in this part of the world, demand explanatory approach to what stands as a critical point of China's strategic choice when it comes to East Asian security space. This paper aims to delve into this issue, highlighting on Taiwan's central role in China's strategic design for the region of East Asia.

Global politics has become even more complex with Russia's intervention in Ukraine which after a year-long war has led to deeper fragmentation of the units within the system of international relations. In parallel, China's remarkable growth in all areas of societal development brought it to the top of strategic competition with the USA and peaked in its global foreign policy and security agenda prompting a battle for the next system's hegemon. It is why this paper aims to scrutinize some of the propositions of the liberal Hegemonic Stability Theory (hereinafter HST) in the context of China's professed "peaceful rise", particularly in

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "PR China" and "China" will be used interchangeably in the text that follows.

light of the current global political fragmentation and growing Western efforts, spearheaded by the United States, to constrain China's ascent. Against this backdrop, this article offers an analysis of China's distinctive response to such challenges, informed by its geopolitical strategy towards East Asia. Notably, this approach places Taiwan, a pivotal geopolitical entity, at the forefront of its priorities. By means of this inquiry, the present study intends elucidating the ramifications of the Taiwan matter on regional security and stability, while underscoring the necessity of reasons that constrain and/or prompt China to undergo more assertive actions towards unification. Thus, the primary argument of this paper posits that Taiwan constitutes the absent element in China's overarching geopolitical blueprint amid the looming escalation of strategic rivalry between China and the United States. Similar analyses that involved Sino-American competition based on the HST principles especially taking into account East Asia (Goh 2019; Purwanti 2020; Loke 2021) could have compounded fewer variables in the past than they can now (Kim & Gates 2015; Kim 2019; Danner & Martín 2019). Chen Jian (2019) argues that the Sino-American rapprochement during the seventies stood as a crucial and influential event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's China's policy, as its implications on East Asian and global politics were profound as it led to a significant realignment of power dynamics between the two Cold War superpowers. He believes that Washington's decision-makers were able to focus their strategic attention and resources on addressing the problems posed by the Soviet Union as a result of the opening of Sino-American relations. On the other hand, the former Soviet Union was constrained to confront both the West and China concurrently, leading to a serious depletion of its strength and power (Jian 2019).

During 1996, Gerald Segal published an important article that ushered the dichotomy of China and East Asia in terms of containing China in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through application of fundamental theories of international relations, Sedal believed this region was a fruitful soil for the application of balancing theory. Namely, he systematically included demographic and economic-social variables such as population, exports, territory area, military power, as assumptions of the initial reference values in which China enters interactions with the countries of East Asia and made a premise on low level of China's resilience to respond to a potential containment or major dispute with the West (Sedal 1996). Similarly, the discussion around China's strategic orientations under the new contemporary conditions created by the

promotion of the “Indo-Pacific” as a region of a critical importance to global security is still modest as there are not many strategic alternatives ahead for Beijing, except taking a defensive and in parallel – proactive stance against “the spokes” (dominantly Japan and Taiwan) in its nearest geographical region.

The following text posits that China’s foreign policy toward East Asia represents a uniquely coherent and systemized approach among its contemporaries. The author goes into the key elements of China’s East Asian strategy by analysing its strategic relationships with Japan, South Korea and stance towards Taiwan, with a focus on the period of the post-pandemic era. The US-led efforts to preserve its dominant unipolar status in the global order through the containment of China constitute a significant driving force behind this intensification. In this context, the paper also analyses the implications of the newly introduced construct-region of Indo-Pacific on China’s foreign and security policy response. Finally, the central section of the study expounds upon the critical stakes of China’s geopolitical agenda for East Asia, through lenses of HST and China’s quest to achieve global hegemony.

## **CHINA’S REGIONALLY TAILORED SECURITY POLICY FOR EAST ASIA**

As a relatively small part of the Asian land mass, East Asia typically compounds area of Mainland China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia and Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Geographically speaking, East Asia is often referred to as the area that includes both the western Pacific Ocean islands, such as Japan and Taiwan and the eastern portion of the Asian continent. Encyclopaedia Britannica offers a more accurate geographic breakdown of East Asia, which includes the East Asian islands, Korea, continental component of the Russian Far East region of Siberia and eastern and north-eastern China (Britannica 2023). However, within the scope of many scientific geopolitical analyses only the Chinese coastline along with Taiwan, Japan and Korean peninsula is being interpreted as “East Asia” (Beeson 2009; Smith, 2009; Holcombe 2017). In addition, some

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<sup>2</sup> While acknowledging that Taiwan is an integral part of China, it is pertinent to note that this article regards it as a distinct entity for the purposes of the case study examined herein. As such, Taiwan will be presented and analysed separately to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of its unique circumstances and implications in the context of the broader analysis.

wider distinctive areas were identified during the World War II, when the Japanese scholars coined the term “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” (GEACPS) to describe their vision of a world order centered around East Asia and based on Eastern ideals, which they believed could replace the conflictual Eurocentric world order of territorial states (Watanabe 2018). In line with this paper’s aim, the following analysis will address the East Asia as the region compounding PR China (including Taiwan), Korean peninsula and Japan.

East Asia evolved on a foundation of the diverse region with a blend of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and other conventional religions over the course of its long history of cultural and economic exchange. Such influence consequently brought a region into permanent turmoil especially in an international context. Its economic growth has been powered by a mix of state involvement, market-oriented policies and technical advancement. In terms of international relations, the regional dynamic is shaped by intertwined processes of disputes between China on one side and Western-supported allies on another. China eroded as the most significant actor in the international politics over the last couple of years promoting its nearest geographical surrounding *volens-nolens* as the core of international security dynamics. Not only did this process lead to further evolution of China’s Grand Strategy, but had also paved the way to its regionally adapted foreign policy approach for East Asia. Ever since the Deng Xiaoping era, China sought to establish security prevalence in this region, but it lacked of assertiveness and was oriented to internal economic (and less political) development and consolidation (Yahuda 1993).

Some scholars have noted that the next era of China’s East Asian regional approach occurred during Jiang Zemin, whose main premise in terms of geopolitics was to provide a solid basis for establishing a strong armed forces for “further challenges” (Scobell 2000, 26). Andrew Scobell described in his paper published in 2000 that the consequences of a potential failed military strike for China in East Asia during Jiang’s era could be catastrophic, especially if the conflict involves Taiwan. This is because China is unlikely to accept defeat and abandon its efforts if the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is defeated on the battlefield (Scobell 2000). According to Scobell’s arguments, if the PLA under Jiang Zemin would have suffered a loss, Beijing would likely need to redouble its efforts to rebuild its military strength and ensure success in future attempts (2000, 26). In the early 2010s, China aimed to maintain

its image as a *status quo* power, as noted by Cheng (2013). However, today this claim would be fiercely contested as China pursues a more assertive and visible strategy towards East Asia. China's approach to the region includes various elements, such as the use of soft power, the pursuit of great power ambitions, a hedging strategy towards East Asian states, the institutionalization of cooperation with the region and a more assertive regional approach (Cheng 2015).

Today, the key political and security rivals of China in East Asia are also some of its most important trading partners. In the context of Sino-Japanese economic relations, it is noteworthy that Japan ranks as China's fifth largest trading partner in terms of overall trade volume, third largest trading partner in terms of export and second largest trading partner in terms of import. Conversely, China holds the distinction of being Japan's largest trading partner, export destination and import source.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the concrete security policy measures, China becomes more assertive than ever in the basin of East China Sea region. Military activities of official Beijing follow the increase of tensions in its nearest geographic surrounding which lasts for more than a decade now. On November 23, 2013, China declared its wider eastern coast a mandatory aircraft identification zone, more specifically – Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). Officially known as the “East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)”, this area encompasses the Senkaku Archipelago in the south and the Sokotra Rocks in the north and it extends nearly to Taiwan's northernmost city of Taipei. ECS ADIZ, unlike any other ADIZ-es in the region, has a significant overlap with the ones that South Korea, Japan and Taiwan have declared. As a response to that, South Korea has immediately widened its zone to the south to cover the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Chinese MFA, the magnitude of trade between these two East Asian nations are exemplified by the total trade volume of 357 billion USD in 2022. This figure represents a substantial flow of goods and services, with China exporting approximately 172.93 billion USD worth of commodities to Japan, while importing roughly 184.5 billion USD worth of goods and services from the island nation (Chinese MFA 2023). The numerical data under scrutiny evince a marked discrepancy between the trade dynamics characterizing Japan's economic ties with China and those linking Japan and the United States during the year 2022. Specifically, it is observed that the aggregate trade volume between Japan and the USA was valued at 228 billion USD, as per the US Census Bureau. Within this framework, Japan's exports to the USA amounted to 148 billion USD, while its imports from the USA stood at a relatively lower value of 80 billion dollars (US Census Bureau 2023).

Sokotra Rock (Rinehart & Bartholomew 2015, 24). This was the first time ever since the Korean War that Korean ADIZ was widened.

According to the Statement on Establishing the ECS ADIZ issued by the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, each aircraft should, report the flight plans to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China or the Civil Aviation Administration of China.<sup>4</sup> Practically all the countries of East Asia – including China and Taiwan, South Korea and Japan have declared their own ADIZ. Additionally, in the geographical macroregion of this area, the Philippines and the USA on Guam also have such zones. In addition, an important aspect of China's military presence and increased assertiveness in its own closest region – and what is especially manifested towards Taiwan, are the overflights of military combat and non-combat aircraft over the central demarcation line of the Taiwan Strait. Such flights have become more frequent in the last three years and take place on a daily basis. According to Taiwan's official stance, such sorties represent a violation of the airspace and ADIZ declared by Taiwan.

Foreign Policy Research Institute data show almost 98% of all sorties were carried out by aircraft based at bases in the Eastern and Southern Theatre Command of China (FPRI 2023). Although the South China Sea is an area where security tensions are manifested due to claiming rights to the waters, China has not yet established a "Southern ADIZ" for this airspace. Furthermore, what complicates the security environment is increase of the US military presence in the region. In 2022 alone, the USA deployed nearly 82.000 troops and maintained 74 military bases only in Japan and in South Korea (Heiduk 2022).

China takes a regionally tailored approach towards these countries as it would promote a coherent response to potential Western containment. This approach brings into play a new variable, namely the opposing factors and dynamics of the new (geo)political construct of the Indo-Pacific region, portraying the promotion of USA-led multilateral security arrangements. In the configuring security architecture of East Asia, over the last few years, several new processes that shape China's response, which can be generically labelled as pull factors, have been singled out. These are the construction of a new region as the significance of global

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<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, all aircraft entering the ECS ADIZ must provide flight plan identification, must maintain the two-way radio communications and respond in a timely manner. They also must be equipped with the secondary radar transponder and lastly must be identified with the clear logo and nationality in accordance with the international treaties.

security – the Indo-Pacific, then the revival of old and the creation of new multilateral security formats – QUAD and AUKUS. Taiwan occupies a central position in the foreign policy of the United States with regard to containing China and has the support of South Korea and Japan in this effort. The rivalry between the United States and China in global affairs has led to the emergence of the Indo-Pacific region as a newly constructed region of a global interest. The traditional *Pax Americana* has given way to *Pax Sinica*, resulting in the formation of a San Francisco System, which was based on a “hub and spokes” system of regional security in Asia that involves various alliances established by the US (Heiduk 2022). While the US has traditionally served as the “hub”, in recent years, Australia and India have been directly included in multilateral security forums, providing additional support to the “spokes” of this system, which include Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Felix Heiduk argues such a security arrangement would be highly hostile toward China and underscores the critical significance of the region in the coming years (Heiduk 2022).

However, security of the East Asia is much more complex issue. Mark Beeson (2009) believed that aftermath of the Global economic crisis in 2008, geopolitics took the primary role in East Asian “making of regions” which especially reflected in China’s openness towards the global markets (Beeson 2009). Contrary to his belief that US endeavours to “inhibit” the process of East Asian regionalisation not only in economic but in political terms would have been unsuccessful (2009, 512), it turned out that almost 15 years after, USA and its allies – Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are determined more than ever to achieve maritime supremacy and contain China in this part of the world. The QUAD and AUKUS, two models of multilateral security association, are not explicitly mentioned but are seen as challenges by China’s latest Global Security Initiative. The initiative was first proposed by Xi Jinping at the BOAO Forum in April 2022 with an aim to “eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts for greater stability in a volatile and changing era and promote durable peace and development worldwide” (Chinese MFA 2023). According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 2023, the initiative emphasizes “indivisible security” and stresses deeper bilateral and individual cooperation over multilateralism in security and defence arrangements.



## CHINA'S GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR EAST ASIA

Other than Taiwan, the axis between Beijing and Tokyo forms the core of East Asia (Sea) geopolitics. Modern relations between China and Japan are burdened by the ballast of the Second World War outcome, in which these two countries were opposing sides. A mild “warming” of relations was initiated by a series of bilateral agreements signed during the seventies of the last century. The first such document – “Japan-China Joint Communiqué” agreed to by both sides in 1972 paved the way for the two nations to normalize their diplomatic relations. It was the basis for the Sino-Japanese “Treaty of Peace and Friendship” which was signed in Beijing in 1978 and entered force the following year when ratification documents were exchanged in Tokyo (Japanese MFA 2023). The political foundation of Sino-Japanese relations was further strengthened by the subsequent publication of the “Joint Declaration on Building Partnership and Cooperation for Peace and Development” in 1998 and the Joint Declaration on “Mutually Beneficial Relations Based on Common Strategic Interests.” These four political documents form the basis of the ongoing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The 2008 Joint Statement outlined five pillars of Sino-Japanese cooperation, including enhancing mutual trust in the political sphere, fostering people-to-people and cross-cultural exchange, enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation for the sustainable growth of the global economy, contributing to the resolution of global issues and continuing to support the Asia-Pacific region (Japanese MFA 2023). Only one article in this text, which made reference to the Joint Communiqué that the two parties signed in 1972, addressed the Taiwanese issue. In that Communiqué, it was stated once more that Taiwan was an inalienable part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China and that the Government of Japan firmly upheld its position in accordance with the Potsdam Proclamation while fully understanding and respecting the position of the Government of the People’s Republic of China (Joint Communiqué 1972, art. 3).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Even today, the Potsdam Declaration, which was signed on July 26, 1945, plays a significant role in Sino-Japanese relations following post-World War II context. According to the Declaration, Japanese sovereignty stretched the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and any other minor islands that the parties decide upon shall be under Japanese control (Potsdam Declaration 1945).

Unlike with Japan, China and South Korea do not witness a long history of diplomatic relations. In 1991, China withdrew its objection to South Korea's inclusion in the United Nations and subsequently established diplomatic ties with South Korea in 1992. It could be said that modern post-pandemic China-South Korea relationship has been marked by both cooperation and tension. One area of cooperation has been in trade and investment, with China being South Korea's largest trading partner (Kim 2023). Bilateral trade volume between China and South Korea for the year 2022 was estimated to have reached US\$362.29 billion, indicating a slight year-on-year increase of 0.1% (Chinese MFA 2023a). A detailed analysis of the figures reveals the import value from South Korea is anticipated to decline by 6.5% and estimated to reach US\$199.67 billion, while China's export is expected to increase by 9.5% to US\$162.62 billion (Chinese MFA 2023a). As of June 2022, the actual investment from South Korea in China has reached a cumulative sum of US\$93.08 billion, whereas our actual investment in South Korea has reached US\$7.71 billion.<sup>6</sup>

Although it is not solely China's diplomatic initiative, it is noteworthy China, along with Japan and South Korea, participates in the multilateral format known as "ASEAN+3". This forum comprises a total of 10 countries dedicated to promoting cooperation in a wide range of areas, spanning Southeast to East Asia. Political cooperation, immigration, political security and transnational crime are three specific areas of focus for more concrete collaboration (See ASEAN Plus Three 2023).

### **Taiwanese piece of the puzzle**

Concerning China's geopolitical strategy towards Taiwan, the extant literature in the West is largely preoccupied with the quandary of a potential military campaign by the People's Republic of China on the island (Chen 2022; Cote 2022; Kastner 2022). It is imperative to differentiate between several components in this regard. Primarily, Taiwan, being an island, occupies a pivotal geopolitical position in China's security policy and represents one of the principal sites where the contest for the emerging world order will be waged. Within this context, Taiwan serves as the epicentre of global security, which, in the post-pandemic epoch, has shifted from the European and Mediterranean regions to the new

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<sup>6</sup> This places South Korea as China's second-largest source of foreign investment, whereas China is the second-largest investment destination country for South Korea.

Indo-Pacific construct. The crux of the Indo-Pacific theatre encompasses Taiwan in the northernmost region, followed by a series of disputed archipelagos in the South China Sea – the Paracel Islands, subject to contention by Beijing, Taiwan and Vietnam and the Spratly Archipelago, which also attracts territorial claims from Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei, culminating in the southernmost region, where crucial transit chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait are situated. Such intensified security complexity leads to potential unilateral use of military force as an instrument of the security policy of the great powers. Some authors are of the opinion that the geography of interventionist politics, the desire to achieve hegemonic stability, then the lucrative reasons for military interventions, as well as the realization of the relative power and status of the intervening actor, are key variables in explaining why superpowers or great powers unilaterally would deploy force in international system (Stekić 2022). From the other spectrum of explanations about the use of military force, interventions are cited as a strategic reason for a great power and part of its Grand Strategy (Sullivan and Koch 2009). In that domain, there are arguments about the internationalization of intrastate conflicts in the states against which military intervention is intended, then different opinions on the geopolitical code of both the target state and the state that is the intervening actor as a possible predictor of military interventions and there are also different justifications for the use of armed force under with the slogan of humanitarian interventionism and pragmatic abuse of the democratization of the countries that were the victims of the intervention, which was especially manifested as an element of the security and foreign policy of the USA at the height of the era of unipolarity. Igor Okunev claims that each geopolitical state code is determined by two fundamental variables, which are orientation and historical *continuum* (Okunev 2013, 68). He argues that while there may be intense debates on this matter, identifying any geopolitical code requires addressing certain questions, such as determining who the potential and current allies and enemies are, figuring out ways to maintain existing alliances and establish new ones and developing strategies to combat present adversaries and potential threats (Taylor & Flint 2000: cited in Okunev 2013: 68).

The following difficulties will affect China's Taiwan policy and consequently East Asian security. The first trend that has emerged in recent years is growing worldwide (and especially Western) support for Taiwan. Over the past few years, Taiwan has experienced growing support

from nations across the world, notably the United States, Japan and some European nations. Even though currently 181 countries around the world, including the United States, have established diplomatic relations with PR China on the basis of the one-China principle (Chinese MFA 2023), most of the countries of the Global West maintain relations with Taiwan in parallel. This backing makes it more difficult for China to politically isolate Taiwan and could motivate Taiwan to fend off Chinese pressure. Second, Taiwan's economy is strong and its high-tech sectors are important participants in the global supply chain. Taiwan has a highly developed economy. According to the ITRI Industrial Economics and Knowledge Center, the production value of Taiwan's semiconductor industry in 2020 amounted to US\$115 billion, representing a substantial annual growth rate of 20.9% (Taiwan News 2021). Notably, Taiwan exhibited superior performance in the semiconductor sector relative to its competitors during the aforementioned year while the industry's output value in Taiwan was likely to rise by an additional 8.6% in 2022 which is by far global majority of semiconductor global production (Taiwan News 2022). Suffice to say that such industry is a key element People's Liberation Army desperately needs to advance its sophisticated means of weaponry. Hence, China's efforts to economically isolate Taiwan could have detrimental effects on China's own economic and military development.

In addition to these factors, relations on both sides of the Strait will be severely burdened by two other challenges. The first is Taiwan's military significancy, which may be attributed to the fact that it is surrounded by highly developed armies, has cutting-edge weaponry and has recently raised its defence spending and the second is internal political opposition; in Taiwan, reunification with China is strongly opposed. It is challenging for China to have an impact on Taiwanese politics since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which now controls the government, is firmly committed to protecting Taiwan's independence.

The One China policy is a diplomatic framework that regards Taiwan as a valid portion of China and the People's Republic of China as its sole legal government. This policy was first formally expressed in 1972 when the United States normalized relations with the PRC and it has since become a cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy. The PRC maintains Taiwan is its part and should eventually be reunited with the mainland, even if it requires the use of force. In near-historic sense, this assertion is primarily supported by China's Anti-Secession Law from 2005. It states that "the country (PR China) may take unreasonable

measures, peaceful means and other necessary measures to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity” if “major incidents occur that will result in Taiwan’s separation from China, or the possibility of peaceful reunification is completely lost” (China Anti-Secession Law 2005: art. 8).<sup>7</sup>

Taiwan was a longstanding challenge in Sino-American bilateral relations since the end of World War II, with the exception of the period of rapprochement in 1972. During a meeting with Nixon, Mao Zedong, the then-President of China, emphasized that Taiwan is an integral part of China. In response, the USA officially acknowledged that “all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait believe there is only one China and that Taiwan is a part of China”. The US government did not challenge this stance and reiterated its interest in a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question through Chinese efforts (Chinese MFA 2023).

Such Beijing’s position goes even beyond the present time. In August 2022, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has published the document titled *The Taiwan Issue and China’s Unification in the New Era*. It acknowledged the Communist Party of China’s role in “promotion of the complete reunification of the motherland” (Chinese MFA 2022). Furthermore, it deploys historical, philosophical and ethical roots to explain why Taiwan constitutes an indivisible part of the PR China. In that manner it represents a *plaidoyer* for reunification offering a set of reasons whose implementation would Taiwan and its inhabitants benefit from. According to argumentation articulated in this paper, official Beijing believes that Taiwan re-unified with continental China would have “a wider space for development” including economic, industrial and supply chain trade development (Chinese MFA 2022). Next, PR China views reincorporated Taiwanese vital interests and its inhabitants as fully protected while the “compatriots on both sides of the Strait would share the great glory of national rejuvenation” (Chinese MFA 2022). However, it is interesting the very last part of this document allows Taiwan to maintain its semi-official institutional cooperation with the third parties, subject to approval of Chinese Government, while international organizations

<sup>7</sup> The Anti-Secession Law also covers the scenario where China may resort to non-peaceful and other necessary measures against Taiwan. These measures must be carried out in accordance with the law’s provisions, and the state is obligated to safeguard the safety, property and other legitimate rights and interests of Taiwanese civilians and foreigners in Taiwan and minimize losses. Additionally, the state must also protect the rights and interests of Taiwanese compatriots living in other parts of China (China Anti-Secession Law 2005, art. 10).

and institutions would also be able to set up their representation offices in Taiwan (Chinese MFA 2022).

All of these proclaimed goals were reaffirmed at the opening of China's National People's Congress at the beginning of March 2023, when Prime Minister Li Keqiang in one of his last appearances in such role, affirmed his commitment to the "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan while vowing to take a firm stance against Taiwan independence. He made this statement as a response to Taipei's call for Beijing to "respect the Taiwanese people's commitment to democratic values and freedom" (Reuters 2023). The announcement also followed a significant 7.2% increase in China's military budget for the year 2023.

The next set of geopolitical toolkit underpinning Chinese "design" for East Asia is the issue of achieving supremacy and global hegemony, or leadership as the official Beijing would claim. Such intention reflected within China's "peaceful growth" critically entails HST postulates. Taiwan is both national and international security issue, which China acknowledge in its official policies. Some scholars argue that a potential conflict over Taiwan is deeply connected with the occurrences in East Tarkestan – Xinjiang and that it would lead to significant economic disruptions for Beijing (Yan 2022). In case of intensification of security tensions China would have to rely on Central Asia for energy and maintain critical supply chains while further entangling China's geopolitical designs over Taiwan (Yan 2022).

The peaceful reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, according to one press release from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is not only a blessing for the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, but also for the international community and the people of the world. It also states the reunification of China won't harm any country's legitimate interests, including its economic interests in Taiwan (Chinese MFA 2022). However, Chinese side sees reunification with Taiwan as a way to prove itself as a hegemon within the international system, thus claims that reintegrated Taiwan would "inject more positive energy into the prosperity and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and the world", consequently making "greater contributions to the cause of world peace and development and human progress" (Chinese MFA 2022). If integrated, China would no more suffer from the containment threat emanating from the US activities in the region. This would consequently mean weaker roles of Japan and South Korea in regional security dynamics. Whether China develops peacefully or not, it cannot become a fully-fledged

superpower without finding a solution to the Taiwan problem. Such a “reputation” constitutes another element of China’s geopolitical strategy for Taiwan and by extension, East Asia and more broadly, for its global aspirations. Only by completing the Taiwan puzzle, China would be able to promote itself to a thalassocratic superpower with a global reach.

## **FUTURE OF EAST ASIAN (GEO)POLITICS: TAIWAN AS AN INCOHERENT PIECE OF THE PUZZLE**

This article discussed China’s stance on the East Asian region, particularly on the issue of Taiwan’s (geo)political status. It highlighted China’s tailored approach to the region and examined it within the context of the global competition for world dominance with the USA. The author provided a set of arguments that China has compelling reasons to pursue reunification with Taiwan in the near future. In spite of many concrete activities and actors involved in this region, there arises a question of which theoretical ground mediates between China’s aspiration to achieve proclaimed “peaceful growth” and ontology of US fears for its shaken global throne? What would particularly be also of interest for further similar studies is whether the HST postulates would work in case of China’s peaceful growth if the globe is being split physically into two (or even more) parallel entities? This reflects predominantly in the field of international finances where efforts are being made to expel US dollar as the global trade main currency. In June 2022, Russia has expressed its willingness to collaborate with China and other BRICS nations in developing a new global reserve currency that would compete the status of the US dollar. During the BRICS 2022 Business Forum, Putin stated that the proposal to create an international reserve currency based on the basket of currencies of BRICS countries was being reviewed. Some analysts believe this move could potentially challenge the US hegemony and the role of the IMF (Business Insider 2022).<sup>8</sup> The ongoing phenomenon of global “decoupling” is manifesting not only in the financial realm

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<sup>8</sup> The process known as de-dollarization has had ripple effects beyond its originating regions. As evidence of this, Brazil and Argentina have initiated discussions in early 2023 regarding the creation of a shared currency called the “Sur” (South). The two nations’ officials have specified the project’s ultimate aim is to establish a novel unit of account, akin to the International Monetary Fund’s Special Drawing Rights, which would serve as an alternative to the United States dollar in the denomination of bilateral trade and financial transactions (CSIS 2023).

but also in the institutional domain of international organizations. A year following the armed conflict in Ukraine, scholars and politicians in the Western world are contemplating the potential suspension of the Russian Federation's membership in the United Nations and other affiliated entities. While practically unfeasible, such endeavours may have unintended consequences by driving the "remaining" countries aligned with Russia and China into a separate political entity, subject to distinct organizational models and regulatory frameworks.

Lastly, a contentious issue is how the Chinese geopolitical strategy for East Asia would change if there were no Taiwan problem, especially in light of the fact that the Indo-Pacific and East Asia have become the new focal points of global security as a result of strategic competition with the US. There is no doubt that China will intensify its regionally tailored approach to East Asian politics in the years to come. Lukas Danner and Félix E. Martin (2019) suggest that in the near future China will be neither violent nor peaceful but a trade-oriented superpower and hegemon in the system of international relations. Because China must maintain commercial activity and military peace on the bases of its economic prowess and its conventional military competitive disadvantage, the so-called "Third Hegemonic Way" or "Dutch-style" hegemony will consider the economy as the primary variable in thinking about China's policy towards the East Asian region, as well as its future global agenda (Danner and Martin 2019).

However, in the examination and comprehension of the overall Chinese foreign policy towards the region, a significant reason appears as relevant and goes beyond the current geopolitical circumstances. Chinese authorities usually refer to the years between 1839 and 1945, which span the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, as the "Century of Humiliation", an era of history characterized by anti-Western and anti-Japanese animosity. This attitude is particularly evident in the culture of remembrance, which includes wars, threats and other military and foreign policy actions taken against China. That is why, although contemporary Chinese society is rooted in the Confucian principles of benevolence, official Beijing will certainly be undertaking activities in the future that will prevent potential repetition of the "Century of Humiliation" and ensure adherence to the Five principles of peaceful coexistence that have been in place for seven decades in its own closest geographic region.



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## **КИНЕСКИ ГЕОПОЛИТИЧКИ ДИЗАЈН ЗА ИСТОЧНУ АЗИЈУ: ТАЈВАНСКИ ДЕО СЛАГАЛИЦЕ**

### **Сажетак**

Овај чланак је приказао позицију Народне Републике Кине према региону Источне Азије са нарочитим освртом на питање статуса Тајвана. Аутор је приказао регионално скројени приступ Кине за овај регион и кроз призму глобалне конкуренције за превођу у свету са САД, указао да је Кина има више разлога за уједињење са Тајваном и то у блиској будућности. Неких од таквих настојања укључују сопствену политику „једне Кине” која Тајван сматра делом континенталне Кине који се на крају мора поново ујединити са копном, чак и ако је за то потребна сила. Међутим, растућа подршка Тајвана широм света, снажна економија, напредни војни значај и унутрашње политичко противљење чине Кини изазове у постизању циља. Поновно уједињење се сматра средством за унапређење софистицираног кинеског наоружања и развоја економије и индустријске трговине, а верује се да ће поновно уједињење користити Тајвану и његовим становницима, омогућавајући им да поделе „велику славу националног подмлађивања”. Свекинески народни конгрес потврдио је у заседању из марта 2023. године своју посвећеност мирном поновном уједињењу са Тајваном, истовремено обећавајући да ће заузети чврст став против независности острва. И поред многих конкретних активности и актера укључених у наведеним процесима, овај рад је изнедрио питање о теоријском утемељењу. Оно би било најадекватније као „посредник” између тежње Кине да постигне прокламовани „мирни раст” и онтолошког страха САД за свој пољуљани глобални статус. Оно што би такође било од интереса за даље сличне студије јесте утврђивање да ли би постулати теорије хегемонске стабилности (или било које друге теорије међународних односа) функционисали у случају мирног раста Кине ако се свет физички подели на два или више паралелних ентитета. Рад је приказао и неке конкретне војне и спољнополитичке

одговоре Пекинга, укључујући војну политику у вези са Зоном обавезне идентификације противваздушне одбране у Источном кинеском мору и последице које произилазе из недавно усвојене стратегије под називом „Тајванско питање и уједињење Кине у новој ери”. Због свеукупног настојања глобалног Запада предвођеног САД да се спроведе спољнополитичка стратегија обуздавања Кине кроз нове мултилатералне безбедносне аранжмане – КВАД и АУКУС, као и промоције конструкт-региона Индо-Пацифика, аутор овог рада верује да ће Кина у наредном периоду иницирати својеврсни интегрисан спољнополитички и безбедносни одговор зарад супротстављања тежњама САД, што би последично могло да има импликације на глобалну безбедност и реконфигурисање међународног поретка каквим га данас опажамо.

**Кључне речи:** Тајван, безбедносна политика Кине, безбедност источне Азије, геополитички дизајн, теорија хегемонске стабилности