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The Architecture of the East Asian Order in the Age of Complexity

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While witnessing the rapid rise of China, discussions in East Asia and the United States on the architecture of a new order for the twenty-first century in the region have become one of the most important issues. Historically, there have been four phases in the East Asian world order; the traditional order of Tianxia (天下) or all under heaven, the modern international order, the Cold-War order, and the complex order of the future. After experiencing three world order transformations, Asia-Pacific countries are now facing two major issues with respect to the new order of the twenty-first century. The first one is the emergence of Pax-Chimerica. The second one is the future of the complex order in the Asia-Pacific itself.

Historical Transformation of Regional Order in East Asia

East Asia had called its regional political space the Tianxia order until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Western international order was first introduced. Originating during the Pre-Qin (先秦) period, the Tianxia order, which is an inclusive hierarchy based on propriety, was applied to all of China after it was united during the Qin (221-206BC) and Han (206BC-220AD) Empires, and was further developed during Sui (581-618), and Tang (618-907) Dynasties. Facing a new reality of “China among Equals” during the period of Sung(969-1279), Liao (907-1125), Jin (1115-1234) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties, China

tried to build a multi-state order based on the balance of power and, at the same time, maintain the traditional Tianxia order. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, China developed more complex types of Tianxia order. An example of this is when the Qing Empire in the 18th century brutally annihilated the Zungar Empire in the North, put on a strong charming offensive toward Tibet, and maintained a typical tributary system with Korea at the same time.

However, East Asia’s Tianxia order was completely incompatible with the mid-nineteenth century modern international order of Europe. China went through the Opium Wars in the 1840s and Japan was visited by the United States’ Black Ship in 1853. Korea’s armed conflicts with countries such as France and the United States came relatively later, happening during the 1860s and 1870s. However, it was not easy for Europe’s international order to replace East Asia’s Tianxia order. Through a series of twists and turns, East Asia accepted the new international order and furthermore rushed into an intense competition of regional imperialism.

The East Asian order after World War II was redesigned under the framework of the U.S. and the Soviet Union-led Cold War order. In 1947, the U.S. started providing large-scale economic support to Western Europe in order to stop the expansion of the Soviet Union’s influence and also started to promote a non-military containment policy regarding the

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Soviet Union. In June of 1950, upon the U.S. entrance into the Korean War—started by North Korea with support of the Soviet Union and China—the nonmilitary containment policy that mainly focused on Europe expanded to a full-scale containment policy that included military means covering the entire globe. In the 1970s, the United States and China, who had been hostile towards each other, went through an easing of strained relations and normalized diplomatic relations. But North and South Korea could not ease tension on the Korean Peninsula despite the July 4th South-North Joint Statement.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union late in 1991 did not simply signal the worldwide end of the Cold War order, but the emergence of the a new complex order. The changes in the 21st century's main actors, stages and performances are reminiscent of the transition that East Asia went through during the 19th century. The competition over power and wealth among nation-states is still fierce, but at the same time, the new concept of the "network state" burst on to the scene. The East Asian order is not an exception. With the rapid rise of China, East Asia, which once was under the Cold War order led by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, is now discussing the emergence of Pax-Chimerica. Moreover, as the world is entering the century of complexity, the discussion on a new architecture for the East Asian order is under active progress.

Emergence of "Pax-Chimerica"

The main actors of the 21st century's transitional era after the post-Cold War period are still in the form of nation-states or nation-empires. In the anarchical international order, each state should be responsible for its own survival and prosperity, and fierce competi-

tion for survival or predominance between nation-states is still on-going. China's emergence as a new main actor in the 21st century East Asia is accepted as fact and the focus of interest is moving to a new era of international relations in East Asia. To begin with, looking at the distribution of military power in the East Asian order, the U.S. which spends \$610 billion of the world's overall military spending of \$1.78 trillion (2014) is maintaining its overwhelming superiority. Military spending by the U.S. is now being reduced to solve the huge government budget deficit; however, it still exceeds the combined military spending of the other top ten countries, and it shows superiority in every area including nuclear, conventional, and cutting edge military capabilities. China's military spending has exceeded \$200 billion for the first time, followed by Russia at \$84.5 billion, and Japan at \$45.8 billion. South Korea spent \$36.7 billion.

The economic distribution of the East Asian order by GDP shows that in 2014, among the world GDP of \$77.3 trillion, the U.S.'s \$17.4 trillion (22.5%) takes up the biggest portion, followed by China's 10.4 trillion(13.5%) which, in 2010, surpassed Japan, whose economic size is about \$5 trillion. Then ASEAN produced \$ 2.3 trillion and Russia produced \$1.9 trillion. In addition, South Korea and Australia produced \$1.4 trillion each. According to the IMF estimates of world GDP in 2020, the U.S. is expected to comprise \$22.5 trillion, and China—the second biggest economy in the world—is expected to produce \$16.2 trillion, increasing the gap rapidly between itself and Japan.

In the case of the distribution of knowledge power, according to the "Top 20 Think Tanks-Worldwide" in 2014, almost half of the top think tanks are in the U.S., proving its overwhelming superiority; and the rest are

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mostly located in Europe. Among think tanks in Asian countries, the Japan Institute of International Affairs is the only one on the list.

Looking at the current distribution of military, economy and knowledge powers in the Asia-Pacific region, we can rather easily discover the emergence of China and at the same time the relative dominance of the U.S.

In this situation, President Barack Obama stated at the U.S. Military Academy’s commencement ceremony in West Point in 2014, “In fact, by most measures, America has rarely been stronger relative to the rest of the world. Those who argue otherwise that America is in decline, are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics. Our military has no peer. The odds of a direct threat against us by any nation are low and do not come close to the dangers we faced during the Cold War. Meanwhile, our economy remains the most dynamic on Earth; our businesses the most innovative. Each year, we grow more energy independent. From Europe to Asia, we are the hub of alliances unrivaled in the history of nations.”

But he also mentioned that the rapidly changing world present not only opportunity, but also new dangers. The question America’s young generation will face is not whether America will lead, but how America will lead. The U.S. should not focus solely on securing the peace and prosperity for itself, but also extend peace and prosperity around the globe.

In her article on “America’s Pacific Century” in *Foreign Policy* from 2011, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton introduced for the first time the U.S. rebalance strategy toward Asia with six key lines of action: strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening U.S. working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military

presence; and advancing democracy and human rights. In particular, she added, “We all know that fears and misperceptions linger on both sides of the Pacific. Some in our country see China’s progress as a threat to the United States; some in China worry that America seeks to constrain China’s growth. We reject both those views. The fact is that a thriving America is good for China and a thriving China is good for America.”

In parallel, at the meeting for the 30th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up on December 2008, Chinese President Hu Jintao defined the Reform and Opening Up as the third revolution following the Xinhai Revolution (1911) and the Socialist Revolution (1949), and announced that a “moderately prosperous society of a higher level” will be built by 2021, which is the Party’s 100th anniversary and by 2049, which is the 100th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, a “prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious modern socialist country will be established.”

Yet, there are three dilemmas China faces on its way to “Civilized China 2049.” First of all, as a result of the successful and rapid economic growth over the last 30 years, China is now facing a conflict between growth and welfare. At the same time, in order for the Chinese economy to achieve long-term rapid growth, it is important to implement a twenty-first century political system by moving beyond the one-party system. Also, China must be able to think complexly and leave behind its narrow nationalistic thinking in order to become a developed country of the twenty-first century. Therefore, twenty-first century China, which is relying only on today’s economic index, should be even more careful, and how successfully and how fast China solves these three dilemmas will determine its future.

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In more detail, Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi succinctly summarized President Xi Jinping’s “new type of international relations” comprising a “new type of major power relations” (新型大国关系) with the United States and a “new type of neighborhood diplomacy,” (周边外交) as a primary principle of Chinese foreign policy. The new type of major power relations with the U.S. includes first “no conflict or confrontation” (不冲突, 不对抗), second “mutual respect” (相互尊重), and third “win-win cooperation” (合作共赢). It shows that China will maintain the strategy of Tao Guang Yang Hui (韬光养晦) or “restrain one’s light and self-cultivate” vis-a-vis the U.S. at least through 2021. China will place more emphasis on establishing its legitimacy as an architect of the new regional order in the Asia-Pacific by competing as well as cooperating in economic relations but avoiding military confrontation during the first half of the 21st century.

As the second principle of Chinese foreign policy, President Xi Jinping strongly advocated a new type of neighborhood diplomacy based on four key ideas of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness (亲, 诚, 惠, 容). In addition, China is now proposing the Belt and Road Initiative, a development strategy which consists of two main components: the Silk Road economic belt and the 21st century maritime Silk Road. As a long-term goal, he is also using the term of building ‘a community of common destiny’ with neighbors.

However, in the process of pursuing neighborhood diplomacy, China also asserts very strongly that it will pursue three essential interests: 1) preserving China’s basic state system and national security (维护基本制度和国家安全); 2) national sovereignty and territorial integrity (国家主权和领土完整); and 3) the continued stable development of China’s economy and society (经济社会的持续稳定发展).

In particular, in the case of hot spots in the region such as territorial disputes in South and East China Sea, military and political problems on the Korean Peninsula, and dispute with Japan, China would like to apply a policy that simultaneously combines the first and second principles. For instance, in the South China Sea, China is now focusing on territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests, and national unity. At the same time it is trying to avoid direct confrontation with the United States.

The Architecture of Complex Regional Order in the Asia-Pacific

America’s rebalance strategy and China’s new model of international relations are currently resulting in the new architecture of Pax-Chimerica in the region. However, as the East Asian countries are still undergoing through a struggle for power in terms of narrowly-defined national interests in the age of modern nationalism, the emerging Pax-Chimerica has potential risks such as security dilemmas, economic crises, emotional disputes, and postmodern challenges. The present arms competition in the region can possibly deteriorate into confrontation in the form of the U.S. and its allies versus China due to strategic distrust. There is also the potential risk of unproductive competition including the AIIB versus the ADB, and the RCEP versus the TPP in the Asia-Pacific economy. The historical legacies of unfinished reconciliation of regional imperialism and the Cold War continuously produce international relations based on sentiments and emotion in the region. Pax-Chimerica is also facing postmodern challenges in areas such as the environment, culture, digital knowledge, and global governance.

Even though the U.S. and China have

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successfully maintained the fragile stability between the established power and the rising power, there is a potential risk of strategic deterioration between two powers given the current strategic distrust. In particular, as the presidential election in the U.S. approaches, the Democratic and Republican parties will have a tough debate on the myth and reality of a "new type of major power relations." From the perspective of the Republican Party, China will not evolve into the "responsible stakeholder" which voluntarily adopts the standard of Western civilization, and therefore the U.S. should pursue a more assertive strategy in regards to China for shaping China's foreign policy in the twenty-first century. In this new situation, even though direct military confrontation is unlikely, strategic deterioration is a distinct possibility. In addition, given the growing security dilemma, China will more assertively protect its core interests using the "new type of neighborhood diplomacy." During this process, the risk of military challenges between China and its neighbors will increase.

In parallel with the rapid rise of the Chinese economy, the traditional economic order in East Asia, led by the U.S. and Japan under the present framework of regional and global economic system, is now facing new challenges. First, along with the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and China's successful management of the crisis, we began to discuss the possibility of a Chimerican economic order in the region. It was at the peak of this discussion when the GDP of China passed Japan's GDP in 2010. However, the combination of China's declaration of the new normal, or 7% economic growth, and the revitalization of U.S. economy brought about the relative decline of this discussion. On the other hand, China's successful launch of AIIB this year raised the argument of a new China-led eco-

nomical order in East Asia with the AIIB competing against the ADB and the RCEP competing with the TPP over the long-term. However, the Chinese government strongly advocates cooperation for common prosperity in the region at this moment. The final scenario we can discuss in this region will be the new architecture of a complex network of economic relations.

The historical formation of national identities in East Asian countries shows three major characteristics. First, the influence of the traditional world order is still important. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned that the notion of this new type of international relations consisting of win-win cooperation did not come to us in a strike of lightning. It actually originates from the rich cultural tradition of the Chinese nation. Second, the formation of national identities in Asian countries is heavily influenced by the global expansion of western modern nationalism during over the last 150 years. Thus, while the West is now trying to move on from modern nationalism, East Asian countries are still going through the rising period of nationalism in the region. Finally, because of the unsuccessful reconciliation of the historical animosity of colonial and war experiences during the late 19th and early 20th century, international politics of emotion is still alive and well in East Asia.

In order to cope with the major problems that the current Pax-Chimerica is facing, the Asia-Pacific region needs a new architecture that can address the complex regional order of today and the future. To that end, first, the relationship between the U.S. and China should avoid falling under the traditional Cold War narrative and evolve into complex relations by weaving together the deepening U.S. alliance networks and the expanding Chinese networks.

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The U.S. has been strengthening relationships with its allies, building strong partnership with new powers like China, and trying to actively participate in East Asian regional organizations more than it used to in order to arrange a new order in East Asia. At the same time, however, its policy of "pivoting to Asia" should be framed as an East Asia peace policy, not as a second containment policy. The U.S. should also design a complex network in East Asia along with the other main actors in the region.

At the same time, Asia-Pacific countries should pay close attention to China's transformation. Over the next ten years during which China will aim to develop its society into a moderately prosperous one, China should actively endeavor to solve three problems and pursue its core interests in accordance with the complex interests of China, East Asia, and the world. To play a central role in arranging the new order in East Asia in the long term, China should successfully achieve political democracy, harmony between development and social welfare, and globalization, so that it can newly define a standard of civilization for East Asia. This requires cooperative efforts from East Asian nations and networks to make China's efforts successful.

Faced with the rapid emergence of China, Japan is now trying to pursue a traditional model of military and economic power competition with the help of the established power, the United States. However, in the age of complexity in the twenty-first century, Japan's traditional model will be forced to pay unexpected political costs from neighboring countries, including Korea and China. Thus, Japan should join the construction of the complex architecture in the region. As a first step, Japan should initiate dialogue with South Korea in order to depoliticize issues regarding Dokdo, history textbooks, and the re-

interpretation of the Peace Constitution. At the same time, both countries should cooperate with each other on the modern stages of peace and prosperity, while also working together on the emerging stages of the environment, culture, and knowledge. From a long-term perspective, the growth of a shared identity in East Asia will finally solve the dilemma.

Korea should develop and practice complex diplomacy to deal with foreign countries as soon as possible, by going beyond its current simple diplomatic mechanism of cooperation and self-reliance. The Korea-U.S.-Japan relationship and the Korea-China relationship are not mutually exclusive; rather, these relationships can be weaved together. South Korea can play the role of weaver in connecting the deepening U.S., Korea, and Japan networks to the expanding China networks. In addition, South Korea needs to develop and embrace new forms of relationships on the regional, global, and cyber levels in the twenty-first century.

North Korea's new leader Kim Jung Un maintains nineteenth century-like anti-foreign power policies and extreme emphasis on self-reliance. North Korea consistently adheres to the military-first or Songun policy and the strategy of dual development or Byungjin of nuclear capabilities and economic capabilities as a survival strategy in the twenty-first century.

Because the possibility of conflicts, rather than understanding and cooperation, is high and inherent to East Asia's international relations, which is still going through "modern adolescence," relying on national effort alone is not enough. In order to resolve this dilemma, countries in East Asia must reduce the possibility of conflict between nations and increase cooperation as much as possible by weaving together a tight network of complex actors both within and outside each country.

Second, the Asia-Pacific needs to consid-

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er its regional order in terms of multi-layered stages, sharing intricate and complex connections with each other. Here, issues on security, prosperity, environment, and culture would form the main stage, with digital knowledge providing the basic foundation. On top of this construct comes politics, the top stage that needs to be built in the Asia-Pacific.

In the twenty-first century the main stages of the military and economy should serve not only national interests but also the interests of East Asia as a region and the world. Furthermore, the stage must change toward one of prosperity and security that takes domestic civil society's interests into account. Simultaneously, to lessen the negative impact of excessive struggles for power and wealth in the modern international order, the stage of culture must be reinforced to cultivate the complexity of national and regional identity. In addition, the significance of the energy/environment stage is rapidly increasing to cope with the environmental challenges in the region. Next, as the age of complexity is mainly driven by rapid advancements in information technology and digital knowledge, the area of knowledge is emerging as the foundation for the three-layered stages in the region. And to successfully manage all these complex stages in the region without regional government, we need to develop a sophisticated stage of regional governance.

Third, we must realize that complex actors give complex performances of self-help, cooperation, and co-evolution across these various stages for the symbiosis of actors in the Asia-Pacific. The performances of the U.S. and the Soviet Union as protagonists during the Cold War were very much similar to the self-centered performance of a wolf. However, as the world is rapidly becoming interconnected based on the information revolution,

performance of the major actors also require the characteristics of a spider that ceaselessly weaves a web in order to catch its prey. Ultimately, in order to successfully survive in the twenty-first century, a complex performance that brings together the characteristics of a wolf and a spider should be mastered. By doing so, ubiquitous networks will be weaved under greater sophistication and charm, forming what I call the three-leveled pagoda of international relations that will sustain the complex, twenty-first century world order.

If actors, stages, and performances of twenty-first century in the Asia-Pacific succeed in their complex transformation, beautiful complex networks can be built in the region that can improve upon the limitations of nationalism, which is excessively narrow, and globalism, which is excessively wide. Furthermore, other major actors of the world will simultaneously adopt the complex networks in the Asia-Pacific as a new standard of civilization in the future. ■

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