

The Impetus Risk of the Northeast Asia Order Transition Under the Vision of America's Strategic Competition with China

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ABSTRACT

The Northeast Asia geopolitics is so complex that the regional order is facing the transformation reconstruction challenge. Great power competition, especially the competition between China and the United States, is the basic variable that influences the transformation of Northeast Asia Order. Since Trump took office, as the gap between China and the United States has narrowed, the United States has strengthened its strategic competition policy toward China, engaging in all-round competition with China in such fields as trade, science and technology, military affairs and ideology. At the same time, the strategic competition between the United States and China makes the Alliance network of the United States expand continuously and the Sino-American relations tend to the new Cold War. Economically, the economic cooperation in Northeast Asia has stagnated, the confrontation between big powers and the dilemma between small and medium-sized countries has been aggravated, and the dual-track decoupling and confrontation have been triggered in the system. China should respond flexibly to the strategic competition of the United States to China, and push the Order of Northeast Asia to the Order of cooperative governance based on the principle of co-construction and sharing.

Keywords: *Northeast Asia, shifting order, Sino-American rivalry, geopolitics*

1. ASKING QUESTIONS

Northeast Asia is located in Northeast Asia, east of the Pacific Ocean. Russia, China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia and other countries around the distribution. The main powers in the region, with their different ideologies, institution and basic national conditions, and their complex geopolitics, have their own interests to pursue so the regional security is sensitive and fragile and the change of regional order in northeast Asia has attracted worldwide attention.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has become the only hegemonic power in the world. Instead of abandoning the alliance system in Northeast Asia, the United States, Japan and South Korea have been taking the alliance as the core to strengthen the regional hegemonic order dominated by the United States. However, with the deepening of economic globalization and the complex interdependence of various countries, the cooperation in the political and economic fields among the countries in northeast Asia has gradually deepened. The hegemonic order led by the United States

with the Cold War mentality cannot adapt to the trend of the development. In particular, its strategic competition policy towards China has aggravated regional tensions and increased geopolitical risks.

In the long run, the policy orientation of U. S. strategic competition with China will not change easily. So in Northeast Asia, will the strategic competition between the United States and China affect the transformation of regional order? What are the risks to the regional situation? In this regard, this paper will first elaborate the theoretical framework of order transformation and put forward two propositions related to order transformation in northeast Asia. Secondly, to discuss the dynamic factors of order transformation in northeast Asia and how the strategic competition between the United States and China promotes the transformation of regional order, and then the article will analyze the risks and challenges during this process. Finally, it points out China's measures.

2. ORDER TRANSFORMATION: THE THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 CONCEPT DEFINITION

2.1.1 INTERNATIONAL ORDER

International order refers to the norms and mechanisms that regulate the conduct of states and international relations in a specific period. [1] Its main actors are sovereign states or other actors of the international community interact in accordance with certain rules and norms. Finally forming a relatively stable structure of rules within the international community. This paper argues that the concept of international order can be discussed from two characters: non-mandatory and variable. First, Non-mandatory means that the international order is only a kind of interaction led by major powers, and does not have legal effect. Although the rule implies the meaning of ‘Compulsion’, only law is the rule with coercive force. Second, Variability means means that the international order is set by the powerful -- changes as power shifts between the ‘Rising power’ and the ‘Holdover power’. The transformation of the ‘Rising state’ from a weak state to a strong one means a challenge to the existing international order.

The transformation of international order means that in a specific historical period due to the core elements have changed, thus causing changes in the order. There is no doubt that the existing international order is the Liberal International order established by the United States after World War II. Under its leading international order, it presents the situation of ‘One super many strong’ and the trend of ‘Multi-polarization’. China is seen as a challenger to the international order set by the United States. As a result, the interaction between the two countries has changed from contact and cooperation to competition and confrontation.

2.1.2 ORDER TRANSFORMATION

2.2 BASIC PROPOSITIONS

2.2.1 PROPOSITION 1: ORDER TRANSFORMATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA—TRANSFORMATION FROM HEGEMONIC ORDER TO CO-GOVERNANCE ORDER

The establishment of new regional relations and order has mainly two dominant factors: first, the war, in which the victor leads the establishment of relations and order dominated by him after the war. Second, the power of the state, having super-powerful forces to force the construction of relationships and order that dominated by them. In the past, in most cases, the two

were shared. Clearly, the latter is based more on national strength. And it can be foreseen as the primary factor in the transformation of regional and even international order in the global scope.

With the rise of economic power and international influence, China has become the biggest challenger to the regional hegemonic order established by the United States. However, we must face up to the fact that the power differences between China and the United States cannot be ignored for a long time. Although the United States is a country outside the region, it can rely on its regional alliance system to interfere in regional affairs and even dominate the regional order in order to form a semi-circular containment to China.

Yet the Donald Trump-era US, with its “America first” orientation and constant friction with its allies, has taken a heavy toll on its system of global alliances. On the contrary, China actively develops partnership and pursues multilateral diplomacy. The Belt and Road initiative has been welcomed by many countries and regions, China has made efforts to the signing of RCEP, bringing East Asian cooperation to a new height. During the epidemic, China’s economy has maintained its momentum, achieving a 2.3% GDP growth in 2020. By contrast, the US remains mired in the epidemic, with GDP shrinking by 3.5 per cent in 2020, which is the biggest drop since the Second World War. To be sure, in terms of the construction of regional order and the provision of public goods, with its performance fight against the epidemic, China has become a challenger to the regional hegemonic order constructed by the United States. It can be expected that northeast Asia is forming a “the dual track” of co-governance order. So in the next few years, this system of co-governance will constitute the basic order of Northeast Asia, the two sides will not form an overwhelming advantage over one side.

2.2.2 PROPOSITION 2: GREAT POWER COMPETITION IS THE BASIC KINETIC ENERGY OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF NORTHEAST ASIAN ORDER

The change of the power between China and the United States has led to the transform of the identity, interest and interactive relationship between the two country, which makes the two sides actively or passively push for the adjustment of rules and mechanisms.

From the perspective of identity, the United States regards itself as the ‘Dominant’ of the hegemonic order in Northeast Asia, while China regards itself as a great power that actively participates in regional affairs. The Biden administration stressed that China was becoming more authoritarian and assertive and it was a threat to the stable and Open international system. [2] A rapidly rising China will threaten its interests in the Asia-pacific. First, China’s rise will cause instability within the

United States alliance system. Second, China will bring the industrial chain in the Asia-Pacific region to the interior of the Eurasian continent, which will reduce the US' s share of the industrial sector in the Asia-Pacific region, at the same time, Japan and South Korea' s industrial chain will also be transferred to China, and become more and more dependent on China. In addition, China' s military power has threatened the 'Island chain layout', a direct threat to the military security in the Asia-Pacific region and even the US. From the perspective of interaction, the core logic of constructivism is that 'Order is established by rules, but rules come from the construction of knowledge' . This also illustrates the necessity of interaction for the transformation and establishment of rules. [3]

2.3 NECESSITY AND IMPORTANCE OF ORDER TRANSFORMATION

First of all, it is to promote the building of a community of shared future for mankind. To promote the establishment of a new northeast Asian regional order, China has provided the world with a theoretical model, that is, the concept of 'Community of human destiny'. Its basic connotation is mainly embodied in politics, economy, culture, security and ecology, emphasizing the equality of all countries, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and governing hand in hand. XI appealed to the world to uphold the sense of 'You have me, I have you' as a community of destiny. [4] at the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind was listed as one of the basic policies of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, [5] as a major peaceful, cooperative and responsible country, China has always been committed to achieving peace and win-win outcomes through multilateral cooperation. However, as a promoter and practitioner of the idea of a community of human destiny, China must break through the hegemonic order dominated by the United States, bring Northeast Asia into the new order under the vision of the community of common destiny of mankind.

Secondly, it is the time demand to defuse the geopolitical tension in northeast Asia. Northeast Asia is a region with complicated geopolitics, interlaced history and realistic problems, and has been under a rather tense environment for a long time. Historically, as victims of World War II, China, North Korea and South Korea have never been able to relax their vigilance against Japan, which is compounded by Japan's refusal to acknowledge its past aggression. After the Second World War, Japan and South Korea were allies of the United States and stood in natural opposition to China. As an extra-territorial country in northeast Asia, the United States has little knowledge of the complicated historical issues left over from the region, and even its

national character is very different from that of the countries in northeast Asia, which can even be regarded as the 'Maker' of some problems. Therefore, the American governance model cannot solve the complicated historical contradiction in northeast Asia. The US-LED six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, for example, have had little effect. Moreover, the United States and its system of alliances with Japan and South Korea are designed to encircle and contain China, provoke national conflicts and exacerbate regional divisions. Thus, Northeast Asian countries can strive for a relatively safe external environment only if they work hand in hand.

Finally, is the degradation of regional security dilemma requirements. The 'Security dilemma', proposed by British scholar Herbert Butterfield and American scholar John Johan Hertz, also known as the 'Thomas Hobbes Fear', refers to the unequal military power between two or more countries, each country wants to improve its own security by building up its own military. [6] the lack of trust between nations reinforces enmity and antagonism by treating each other as enemies who threaten their own security. North Korea's nuclear self-preservation has raised fears in Japan and South Korea that it could prompt them to consider a nuclear path. [7] and the region of Northeast Asia entered into a nuclear arms race. Since the Cold War, the United States has adopted the policy of 'Island chain blockade' in the Asia-Pacific region, with Japan, Taiwan and the South China Sea as the first island chain. If China is to achieve reunification and even expand its maritime Sphere of influence, it must break through the blockade imposed by the United States. But as the strategic rivalry between the United States and China intensifies, the United States is bound to take more military action in the South China Sea to contain China.

3. THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA: THE BASIC MOTIVE FORCES OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF NORTHEAST ASIA ORDER

3.1 REASONS FOR U.S STRATEGIC COMPETITION WITH CHINA: A CHANGE IN THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN CHINA AND THE U.S

According to a widely influential study by the American scholars Stephen Brooksville and Wilhelms Wolfers, the ability to compare among great powers is largely made up of three components, military Capability, economic capability and technical capability. In 2010, total wealth in the US was \$144,000 bn, compared with \$320,000 in China. In terms of military spending, meanwhile, China overtook Japan to become the second-largest economy in terms of gross domestic

product. The US spent more than twice as much as China in 2014. [8]

Despite China's rapid development and its commitment to multilateral diplomacy, the AIIB and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have won praise from cooperating countries, but they do not actually threaten American leadership. However, according to IMF projections released in April 2020, China's economy will reach more than 70 percent of the U.S. economy for the first time in 2020, a month earlier than in October 2019. [9]

3.2 U.S POLICY ON STRATEGIC COMPETITION WITH CHINA

3.2.1 TRADE SANCTIONS AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETITION

On February 16, 2018, the United States Department of Commerce released a national security investigation into U.S. imports of steel and aluminum, marking the beginning of U.S. trade sanctions against China. The beginning of the Sino-US trade war declares that the great power competition between China and the US has become the normal state of bilateral relations.

In the field of science and technology competition, China has been following the 'Market-for-technology' approach since its reform and opening-up, encouraging western developed capitalist countries to invest in China. Therefore, China's technology accumulation at this stage is relatively rapid, this is the most important reason why the U. S. started the science and technology war with China. However, the United States believes that there are many "Sensitive technologies" in the high and new technologies imported to China by the domestic industries of the United States over a long period of time. At the same time, the latest technologies developed by China itself have created huge competition for the domestic industries of the United States, so this stage of the Sino-US Trade War and the hot fight between science and technology.

3.2.2 IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE VERSUS MILITARY ACTION

Another important means of US strategic competition with China is that the US tries to combine the ideological struggle with military action, and use the ideological opposition to cover up the actual military action.

The US military sanctions against China since the Donald Trump administration have been more prominent than the ideological confrontation, such as the implementation of the 'Indo-pacific strategy', the intensification of military exercises in the region, and the repeated creation of unrest in the South China Sea.

Predictably, the Biden administration will continue these policies to some extent.

4. THE RISK CHALLENGE OF THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF NORTHEAST ASIA ORDER

4.1 POLITICAL RISK: THE EXPANSION OF COALITION POLITICS AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW COLD WAR ORIENTATION IN SINO-U.S RELATIONS

The strategic competition between the United States and China will bring significant political risks to the regional order of Northeast Asia. The basic evolutionary logic is that the United States will strengthen its presence in northeast Asia and promote the expansion of American Alliance politics including Japan and South Korea, further, the overall division of the countries in northeast Asia will lead to an irreversible trend, that is, the Sino-US relations will gradually "New Cold War", and northeast Asia will gradually become the main battlefield of the Sino-US New Cold War.

In fact, since Donald Trump came to power, the 'America First' strategy, the United States actually more focused on obtaining substantive, priority economic interests, and this has something to do with Donald Trump's own style of governance. Biden came to power, in the face of a relative decline in the overall strength of the United States, its choice of the Alliance system to support regional hegemony. It is almost certain that the future direction of Sino-US relations will basically determine the US northeast Asia Regional Alliance politics, and thus determine the northeast regional order. As long as the structural conflicts between China and the US in northeast Asia can not be resolved, the order of the northeast will always develop towards the new Cold War and division.

4.2 ECONOMIC RISKS: NORTH EAST ASIA'S ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION STAGNATES

The rivalry between the US and China took shape during the Obama administration and intensified completely during the Donald Trump administration. Under Obama, the United States established the trans-pacific partnership (TPP), which expanded from the economic sphere to the political and military spheres through its influence, creating a great counterbalance to China, it also gradually controlled the regional economic order in East Asia.

Focusing on the current situation of Sino-us

competition in northeast Asia, it is not difficult to find that the structural contradiction between China and the US in northeast Asia has brought huge negative impact on the economic and Trade Cooperation and integration in northeast Asia. Because China entered the post-epidemic era early with the ‘China Speed’ of epidemic prevention, China is in the lead of economic development in northeast Asia as a whole, while China’s economic growth rate was stable, new economic vitality emerged. China’s economic radiation to northeast Asia during this period was relatively obvious. However, due to the regional division caused by the competition between China and the United States, in addition, the countries in northeast Asia are generally impacted by the epidemic, so the economic risk brought by Sino-US competition will probably lead to the stagnation of economic and trade cooperation and integration in northeast Asia.

4.3 INSTITUTIONAL RISK: THERE IS A TREND OF DUAL TRACK AND DECOUPLING BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL RULES AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The relationship between the so-called international rules and the international order should, fundamentally speaking, be one of mutual promotion, mutual restraint and common development. The reason for this is that the shaping of international rules is fundamentally derived from the international order, that is to say, it is the development of the existing international order that promotes the joint formulation of international rules by the countries in the region, and vice versa. During the Cold War period, the order in northeast Asia was mainly based on the Korean peninsula and divided into two opposing camps. The international order in Northeast Asia was greatly influenced by the game between the U. With the end of the Cold War, the world entered the 21st century, the original Cold War pattern disappeared, replaced by the advent of the era of globalization, the relationship between the countries in northeast Asia is relatively relaxed.

5. CONCLUSION

Today, economic globalization and complex interdependence make the countries of the world interconnected and inseparable. The United States tried to reshape the rules of Northeast Asia with zero-sum thinking, and pushed Northeast Asia into the order of binary opposition to maintain its established hegemonic order.

In the new era, only the principle of ‘Joint consultation, joint construction and sharing’ advocated by China is the value idea of constructing the cooperative governance order, and also the direction of the transformation of Northeast Asia Order. In recent

years, China has taken the Belt and Road initiative to deepen its opening-up to the outside world, paving the way for peace and win-win progress for the countries along the belt and road China uses RCEP as a driving force to inject new strength into regional and even world economic development, and to boost East Asian regional cooperation to a new height. China takes the lead in the concept of ‘A community of shared future for mankind’ and contributes its strength to global issues through concrete actions, demonstrate the ‘China solution’ to resolve the zero-sum thinking held by the United States through the cooperative thinking of joint governance. All these facts show that the hegemonic order led by the United States with the Cold War mentality no longer meets the requirements of the times and development, and the new regional order advocated by China is not only theoretically advanced, it is also practical and pioneering, and only it can meet the needs of the interests of Northeast Asia in the transitional period.

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