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**ASEAN CHINA – US RELATIONSHIP  
AFTER THE COLD WAR – AN ANALYSIS  
OF ASEAN’S STRATEGIC SECURITY  
CONCEPTIONS TOWARDS BIG POWERS**

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## **Abstract**

The study presents a personal macro-view of ASEAN's strategic security conceptions toward big powers, contextualized in the China-U.S. relationship in East Asia. A basic methodology used in this study to analyze and assess ASEAN's strategic security conceptions is the Structural Realist theoretical framework and approaches. First, it attempts to justify what kind of the structural constraints arise and operate in East Asian Region. Second, it will examine how less powerful states like ASEAN countries react to the constraints and try to strategically manage their security environment. Lastly, it will evaluate their strategic security-management conceptions and sketch the possible direction of the regional security development in the future. The basic conclusion is that ASEAN security architecture, embodying its constructive strategic security-management conceptions, is conducive to the regional security by encouraging a cooperative environment, norms setting and mechanisms building. However, it remains to be constrained by the internal and external structural factors. Hence, there is doubt that ASEAN security architecture could lead to the realization of the organization's idealistic strategic visions and objectives. The study suggests that the possible remedy could be to change power structure and creatively construct the security community in a hegemonic system.

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# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| I INTRODUCTION   |    |
| (i) Definitions.....   | 4  |
| (ii) Scope and Direction.....  | 5  |
| (iii) Framework of Analysis: Structure and State.....                  | 6  |
| II POWER STRUCTURE AND THE SECURITY IN EAST ASIA .....                 | 7  |
| (i) Power Distribution.....  | 7  |
| (ii) Polarity: Global Unipolarity and Regional Bipolarity.....         | 8  |
| (ii) China-U.S. Relationship and the Security in East Asia.....        | 9  |
| III ASEAN'S "SECURITY DILEMMAS"  |    |
| (i) Structural Constraints and "Security Dilemma".....                 | 11 |
| (ii) State-Induced "Security Dilemma".....                             | 12 |
| (iii) Systemic Inter-State "Security Dilemma".....                     | 15 |
| IV ASEAN'S STRATEGIC SECURITY CONCEPTIONS TOWARD BIG POWERS            |    |
| (i) Small states and "Cooperative Security".....                       | 17 |
| (ii) ASEAN's Strategic Security Visions and Objectives.....            | 19 |
| (iv) ASEAN's Security Estimation and Threat Perceptions.....           | 21 |
| (Iv) ASEAN'S Strategic Conceptions Vis-à-Vis Big Powers.....           | 24 |
| V ASSESSMENTS OF ASEAN'S POST-COLD WAR STRATEGIC SECURITY ARCHITECTURE |    |
| (i) China-ASEAN "Security Dilemma".....                                | 28 |
| (ii) Mitigating the Security Dilemmas.....                             | 30 |
| (iii) ASEAN's Security Architecture: "ascendant or decadent?".....     | 32 |
| VI STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND EAST ASIAN SECURITY IN PROSPECTS              |    |
| (i) Hegemonic System and International Security.....                   | 35 |
| (ii) The Possibility of the Chinese Hegemony in the Region.....        | 37 |
| (iii) East Asian Community in the Hegemonic System.....                | 40 |
| VII CONCLUSION.....  | 42 |

## I INTRODUCTION

### (i) Definitions

A **strategy** is defined in *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary* as a plan or policy designed for a particular purpose over a long period of time. The term in the sense of traditional international politics is narrowly interpreted as “the use of military means to serve a political purpose”; but it is widely accepted today that the interpretation should not be restricted. Now the concept of strategy can be understood as “the matter of relating ends to means: it is intrinsically connected with the exercise of political power”.

**Security** is considered “an underdeveloped concept”<sup>1</sup>. To my understanding, it basically refers to a state being free from both existential and perceptual threats. It implies here that a threat arises not only from objective existence but also from subjective assessments. With the evolvement of the international politics, a state is seeking more broadened scope of security nowadays than before. Especially for those states that are geographically small, militarily weak and economically less-developed, security is normally addressed in a comprehensive way, comprising an array of traditional and non-traditional dimensions. Moreover, with the strong tide of globalization, a modern state is concerned about beyond national security. International security or common security is also taken into serious consideration. It suggests that both external and internal factors are equally crucial to a state's security.

**The study of a security strategy**, therefore, simply focuses on how a state achieves its security objectives in the given environment.

**(ii) Scope and Direction**

This study presents the author's personal macro-view of ASEAN's strategic security conceptions toward big powers, contextualized in the China-U.S. relationship in East Asia.

It may be argued whether ASEAN countries have clear-cut security strategies towards big powers. However, from my own observation, they definitely have some unambiguous strategic security thinking, on which their foreign policies toward big powers are solidly based. Aside from that, although ASEAN countries do not have common security policies, yet as less powerful countries they do share common strategic security thinking vis-à-vis major powers. So the concern of the study is this underlying strategic thinking.

The starting point of the analysis is that states are subjected to structural constraints in the anarchical or self-help system. Power structure imposes effects in indirect way on states' behaviors and outcomes of interactions. In this light, my argument is that it's China-U.S. relationship in East Asian Region that creates the regional security environment, which limits and molds the pattern and trend of the regional international politics and thus designates ASEAN's international security context and the parameters of their strategic planning and security management.

The basic idea is that relatively small and weak states enjoy narrow margins of safety and limited strategic security options; however, they may use their leverage as much as they can to "modify the rules of the system to suit their own interests" or, put in another way, to affect the process of international relationship.

The study attempts to achieve the following objectives: first, it will justify what kind of the structural constraints arise and operate in East Asia; second, it will examine how less powerful states like ASEAN countries react to the constraints and try to strategically manage their security environment; lastly, it will evaluate their strategic security-

management conceptions and sketch the possible directions of the regional security development in the future.

**(iii) Framework of Analysis: Structure and State**

A basic methodology used in this study to analyze and assess ASEAN's strategic security conceptions is the Structural Realist theoretical framework and approaches. However, other approaches are also employed wherever needed to help understand the discussed issues.

The logic of the Structural Realist theory is that structure and states are “dual causation” of the outcomes of international politics. Therefore, analysis of structure and units should be paid equal attention to. Nevertheless, structure is considered primary and fundamental, as it is the strategic environment, it “selects” and it shapes states' functional type. The Realist theories, as often critically pointed out by many scholars, are flawed in ignoring the less powerful states in the system. This study, in conformity with the conventional way, will take the less powerful states as the major referent units.

Accordingly, the study is composed of two parts: the structure-level analysis and the state-level analysis.

At the structural level, I'm going to look into the structural features in the region and the resulting security dilemmas.

At the state level, I will focus on the analysis of ASEAN's strategic visions, their security estimation, the 3 levels of strategic security-management conceptions, and the effects of their strategic management on the process of the regional international politics.

## II POWER STRUCTURE AND THE SECURITY IN EAST ASIA

### (i) Power Distribution

To our common understanding, power structure is defined and ordered by distribution of power. It is shaped by polarity. A state's power is weighed by its "**combined capabilities**"—the strength in all categories, e.g. industrial & technological production and economic self-sustaining capacity, military strength and projection ability, political assertion and influence, etc.; so the distribution of power refers to the "**distribution of capabilities across states**".<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, as Robert Ross aptly pointed out, **geography** is also a vital structural factor that "determines whether a state has prerequisites of great power status".<sup>3</sup> Geographic assets like resource endowment and strategic depth may reinforce or weaken a state's capabilities.

Besides, **ideational factor** does affect a great power status **in some occasional instances**. The most prominent example is China's imagined great power status. China was created as a "superpower" by Nixon's administration in its image in 1970s, though China was still economically and militarily weak at that time, which Kenneth Waltz ridiculed it as "the greatest act of creation since Adam and Eve"<sup>4</sup>. Actually, American imaginary creation of China's great power status can be dated back to Franklin Roosevelt's time at the end of the WWII, when he treated China like a world's major power and conferred permanent membership in the Security Council of UN on China.

In light of such measurement, U.S., China, Japan and Russia are evidently standing out as the major powers in East Asia. But Russia is normally identified by Asian states as a European state rather than an Asian state. More importantly, as the Soviet Union collapsed, the inherited state Russia is more inward looking. So it is common that when people either in the governments or in the academic assess the strategic environment in



East Asia after the Cold War, they mostly relate to U.S., China, Japan and the triangular relationship.

However, I share Robert Ross's argument that **China and the United States are the two poles in the region**, while Japan and Russia if included are "lesser great powers" or "second-class great powers", and thus the power structure in East Asia after the Cold War is characterized by bipolarity.<sup>5</sup> It is neither multipolar as it is widely believed, nor unipolar as Peter Van Ness argued<sup>6</sup>.

**(ii) Polarity: Global Unipolarity and Regional Bipolarity**

It is acknowledged that the global power structure in the Post- Cold War Era is unipolarity. Nonetheless, it is not necessarily entailed that U.S. dominates the regional politics and security. U.S. plays the so-called "offshore balancing" role, but it always projects its power into every region.

In East Asia, it is important to be noted, China is not an emerging power but "an established regional power". China used to be the power center of the regional concentric circle in history and has gradually regained its most influential power status in the region since 1950s. The rapid economic growth and development of military capability after the cold war has tremendously reinforced China's combined capabilities and its "imagined superpower" status. Given the existence of U.S. "balancing power" in the region, the regional power structure in the Post-Cold War era is thus bipolar—the leadership in the regional politics and security is shared by China and the United States, although the capabilities of both poles cannot be equally compared. Robert Ross defined and justified the bipolarity in East Asia as "Chinese dominance over mainland East Asia and U.S. dominance of maritime East Asia".<sup>7</sup>

In retrospect, we can find that the bipolar regional power structure had already taken its shape during the Cold War, when the major rivals in the region were China and the United States. Shortly before and after P.R. China was founded in 1949, Stalin had entrusted Mao Zedong to shoulder the major responsibility of supporting the anti-

colonialism and imperialism movements in the Far East and later the Chinese leaders themselves had the stronger desire and confidence to lead the regional revolution. As a consequence, it was China-U.S. relationship that dominated the regional Cold War contour. The heightened confrontation led by these two 'frère ennemi' ("adversary partners"), from the Korean War to the Indochinese War, resulted in the polarization of the region and enormously affected the regional stability. Of course, 1970s and 1980s experienced a period of time when the "strategic triangle" replaced China-US confrontation in East Asia due to the breakup of China-Soviet relationship. But immediately after the end of Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's influence has eroded away. In sharp contrast, China has achieved greater influence in the region. Then the regional bipolarity is re-emerging.

Although Japan is economically and technologically advanced and powerful, it is not considered to be a pole in the region, because of the following reasons. First, Japan has no prerequisites of the pole status due to its geographic constraints-prominently lack of strategic depth and natural resources. Second, with the increasingly close economic interdependence among countries, Japan is more vulnerable than greater self-sufficient U.S. and China. This unavoidably contributes to reducing Japan's power status. Third, Japan's defense and foreign policy since it was defeated in WWII has to be very much dependent on its cooperation with the U.S. Nevertheless, it is admitted that Japan, as a lesser great power, possesses considerable capability to affect the regional balance of power.

### **(iii) China-U.S. Relationship and the Security in East Asia**

Therefore, in the bipolar system of East Asia in post-Cold War era, China-US relationship undoubtedly has the strongest bearing on the regional politics and security. It is this fundamental factor that creates the regional security environment.

China-US relationship is characterized by structural competition and rivalry. But it doesn't mean that the two great powers are in a state of tension, conflicts, or wars all the

time. On the one hand, the relationship can be stable, with a lot of strategic cooperation; but on the other hand, it can be confrontational, with tensions and conflicts. Hence, whether more cooperation or more confrontation between these two poles will greatly affect the regional peace or war.

Then what are the major factors that will affect their cooperation or confrontation? First of all, it is the common strategic imperative and aspiration for both China and the United States to maintain regional law & order, stability and prosperity. It is obviously in the interest of both sides, because they are the biggest beneficiaries in the bipolar system. For this basic purpose, China and the U.S. will be able to become “strategic partners” and work together. However, the state-induced security dilemma (I’ll elaborate on it in the following chapter) generates insecurity for both sides. Their perceptions of threat create mutual hostility and correspondingly they treat each other like “strategic competitors”. It is this inherent opposite force that would divert the two powers from cooperation to confrontation time and again and even lead to spiral escalation of tension. The role of less powerful states is another significant variable that would matter in China-U.S. relationship. They could start the flashpoints that ignite tension and conflicts between these two major powers, just like the cases of the Korean War and the Indochinese War. Or they could initiate and push forward the peaceful vehicle that helps promote cooperation between the two major powers.

From these points, we may draw some implications for the security in East Asia:

1. The regional power structure, based on China-U.S. bipolarity, defines the international security context for the less powerful states in the region and the parameter of their strategic planning and security management. Like it or not, they have to take into serious account of these two major powers in the calculus of their national security and the international security and have to adapt their security strategies to the development of the regional bipolar structure.
2. If China-US relationship is stable with more cooperation, the less powerful states will have more freedom to choose their security options

but may have less leverage to exercise on the two big powers. However, if China and U.S. relationship is strained and confrontational, the margins of the lesser powers' safety will be narrowed and their strategic security choice limited but may have more leverage on the two big powers.

3. In this connection, it is in their interest if the less powerful states are active to play a positive role in promoting cooperation between China and U.S., but at the same time to employ the balancing politics. Then they may use their leverage as much as they can to “modify the rules of the system to suit their own interests” and thus affect the process of international relationship in the region.

These implications can be better understood when we look into the operational structural constraints.

### III ASEAN'S “SECURITY DILEMMAS”

#### (i) Structural Constraints and “Security Dilemma”

Based on the structural features in East Asia, we can find that structural constraints arise and operate in the region.

Structural constraints are basically manifest in all-pervasive security dilemmas. The prototype of a “security dilemma” is described as a situation in which efforts to preserve security can make all states involved more insecure. But the term, models and application have evolved over time. Now there could be traditional systemic inter-state security dilemma, state-induced security dilemma or intra-state security dilemma. In East Asia, all these security dilemmas, internal and external, would be possibly concurrent and relevant to the security of many countries. Dr. Alan Collins has holistically examined this issue in his monograph *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2000).

As far as ASEAN's strategic security in relation to the major powers is concerned, the state-induced and the systemic security dilemmas in the mega-region are more significant than intra-state security dilemma and thus will be emphasized in this study. And my interpretation of these security dilemmas is very different from Dr. Collins'.

**(ii) State-induced "Security Dilemma"**

Jack Snyder is the first to define a state-induced "security dilemma", in which an imperialist or a revisionist power believes its security requires the insecurity of others' by conquest. The definition has been expanded later and its modified version refers to a situation in which the hegemonic state deliberately requires others' insecurity by intimidation so that its hegemony is consolidated and others are too frightened to challenge it.<sup>8</sup>

The state-induced "security dilemma" in East Asia is initiated by U.S. hegemonic or unilateral global defense action. For the purpose of maintaining its status-quo supremacy and leadership in the World, the United States seeks to increase its absolute military power in order to intimidate any potential challengers. It always disguises its own action in a "benign" intent, while interpreting any self-defense response of other powers as revisionist or aggressive.

In East Asia, U.S. major security concern is China. China, whether an actual, imagined or potential great power, is considered as U.S. principal challenger. The U.S. Government did not take New China serious until the Korean War, when it began to realize the biggest rival in East Asia was not the Soviet Union but China. The Vietnam War deepened U.S. understanding of China's role in the region. With the end of Cold War, the U.S. lost its global targeted enemy and its security focus was thus shifted to the potential regional dangers. U.S. feared that China would take the opportunity to fill the "power vacuum" in the region by political and military expansion and then threaten U.S. established interests. China's rapid economic development and hence strengthening of its effective capabilities intensifies U.S. apprehension. The realist and neo-conservative Americans either in the Government or in the academia and the mass media began to

create a big story of “China’s threat”, holding that China will not only challenge U.S. world’s supremacy but also eventually overturn the status-quo international system in the future when it grows up. Considering that China has different ideological belief and political system, different cultural values, and historical experiences of confronting the Western powers, they singled out China as the most unsatisfied revisionist power among other regional powers and paralleled it to Germany in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Consequently, by the end of last century, the “China’s threat” proposition had been widely accepted in the United States. Owing to the terrorist attack on Sept.11, 2001, China’s high profile of threat in US image has been gradually lowered down. Nonetheless, the United States has been committed to enhancing its alliance system and its superior nuclear and conventional deterrent power by implementing NMD and TMD and relocating its overseas military forces. The American forward-defense system in Asia Pacific used to be deployed to contain China during the Cold War and now is targeted at so-called “potential adversaries”. Moreover, the U.S. Government has begun to pursue a pre-emptive defense policy to counter terrorism and other threats, which puts U.S. in a more aggressive posture than ever.

In this scenario, the U.S. security action has increased China’s insecurity and generated hostile reaction. Ever since New China was born in 1949, U.S. has already been identified as the main source of China’s security threat. During the Cold War, the U.S. not only denied the legitimacy of PRC until Nixon’s time, but also adopted the policy of containment towards China—political and diplomatic isolation, economic blockade, and military encirclement. After the Cold War, even though the U.S. Governments has adjusted its China policy from containment to engagement, the American de facto policy and behavior towards China is more accurately interpreted as “congagement” (containment plus engagement). So based on the recent past experience and reality, the Chinese leadership is very much concerned about U.S. military redeployment and posture and deeply skeptical and intensively fearful of the intention of U.S. to project its power in East Asia. As the reaction to the situation, the Chinese leadership strongly believes that the best way of counter-fear and achieve national security is to strengthen China’s combined capabilities and build up its own powerful defense system.

Then the state-induced security dilemma is in operation. In order to achieve its own hegemonic security, the U.S. requires its rival to be de facto insecure, no matter how it claims it intends no harm. China, although not willing to confront the U.S. directly, has to strengthen its own military muscle to protect its security and interests. As a result of the interaction, both sides feel more antagonistic and less secure.

The “security dilemma” between China and U.S. is significant to the security of all countries in the region. The dilemma imposes not only direct effects on the two contending big powers themselves but also indirect effects on the other less powerful states including ASEAN countries.

First, the two major rivals are highly sensitive to and tend to compete for the siding of other parties. Allying of other parties with one side means to strengthen one side’s weight but simultaneously increase the other’s feeling of insecurity. This situation provides bargaining power and leverage for the less powerful countries to influence the two big powers; but at the same time it presents them the risk of being dragged into China-U.S.’s rivalry. So if the bipolar relationship is stable, it’s often preferable for the other parties to stay neutral or stand aside but they may lose a lot of their leverage on the big powers.

Second, in the game of the bipolar rivalry, the rule of balance of power is commonly applicable for the other parties. It is believed that balancing (aligning with the weaker side) is beneficial for the third parties because it resists hegemonic dominance so that the third-party states can maintain their independence and security and it enables the third-party states to have more say and influence within the weaker coalition. But it doesn’t necessarily mean that the third parties would always side with the weaker power. Smaller and weaker states would be more prone to bandwagon (joining with the stronger power). And if a state seeks balance of threat, its decision of siding would depend on its subjective assessment of threat.

Third, if the bipolar security dilemma is aggravated, the level of tension will be elevated in the region. Under the circumstance of high-level confrontation, the big powers will heighten their competition for the support from other parties, and consequently the smaller and weaker states as the other parties are probably compelled to choose either side to varying extent, from tilting, allying to depending. Of course, as some people would argue, they don't have to choose sides or play the game. It is true that a state has the right to choose or not choose; but it will put their national interests at high risk, if not choosing. 1) They don't have the capability to protect or sustain their neutrality and independence, if not guaranteed by the major powers. As Kenneth Waltz indicated, "In a competitive arena, however, one party may need the assistance of others. Refusal to play the political game may risk one's own destruction."<sup>9</sup> 2) Small and weak states would be entangled in the tension or conflicts between big powers, willing or not, because the contesting rivals would intervene in one way or another, as it happened during the Cold War. When elephants fight, grassland cannot be safe. In this situation, if they choose to stay out of the highly competitive game, they could have higher risk of falling victim to the confrontation and becoming the pawns of the big powers. 3) They will lose any chance at all to maneuver their influence though limited over the major powers in order to protect their national interests, if not playing the game.

In short, ASEAN countries like other lesser powers in the region are more or less under the pressure of the state-induced bipolar "security dilemma" in the region.

### **(iii) Systemic Inter-State "Security Dilemma"**

Complicated enough, the state-induced security dilemma in the region is intertwined with the systemic inter-state security dilemmas. The dynamics of the most vital systemic inter-state "security dilemma" in East Asia arise from China's rise and the reaction of its neighboring countries.

China's rise is reflected in its vigorous and fast-paced economic and military development. It is interesting to mention here, in late 1970s, Kenneth Waltz insisted, "As



a future superpower, the People's Republic of China is dimly discernible on a horizon too distant to make speculation worthwhile", because China could not increase its production and simultaneously acquire a large and modern military capability. He said, "It's doubtful that she can do either, and surely not both, and surely not the second without the first." <sup>10</sup> However, after 20 years, everyone is witnessing that China is not only able to do either but also able to do both, and surely it has started to do the second based on the first.

Hence, China's rapid economic and military modernization has enormously reinforced its established power. China's overwhelming great power, with full-fledged influence, has never been felt so real as today by its neighboring countries since 1949. Uncertainty and anxiety of China's capabilities, its tendency of hegemonic ascension and especially its long-term intention induced all less powerful states around China to feel insecure. When China is increasingly concerned over its territorial integrity, backed by its intentional or unintentional military deterrence, the countries that share border with China either on land or at sea feel more fearful than others.

The reactions of China's neighboring countries are varying. They may roughly fall into 3 categories. In the first category, the states bandwagon<sup>11</sup>, acquiescing to the new power "hierarchy" through accommodation and gaining benefits. In the second category, the states try to balance against China in ways of stepping up their own defense programs and strengthening their association with other great powers. In the third category, the states would like to engage China on the basis of balancing (it is also called "soft balancing").

In the first situation, the systemic "security dilemma" will not operate. In the second situation, the "security dilemma" will operate, because their manners of balancing would cause China's apprehension and antagonistic action in return and then results in mutual hostility and insecurity. In the third situation, the "security dilemma" may or may not operate, depending on circumstances, threat perceptions and effectiveness of engagement.

The reactions of ASEAN countries as individuals to China's rise spread in all 3 categories, but ASEAN as a whole tries to respond in the third-category way. Whether China-ASEAN "security dilemma" would operate and deteriorate depends to great extent on how ASEAN countries estimate the risks of China's rise and accordingly react to it. It'll be further discussed later.

Aside from the systemic security dilemma between China and its neighboring countries, there exist other systemic security dilemmas among the ASEAN states.<sup>12</sup> These inter-state security dilemmas would also complicate their perceptions of China and accordingly affect their decisions to balancing, bandwagoning or other tactics vis-à-vis China.

As a result, the operation and effect of the systemic inter-state security dilemmas are interwoven with that of the state-induced security dilemma between China and U.S. When the neighboring states treat China like a threat, they are apt to siding with the stronger power U.S., rather than the weaker power China. Then the intervening effect of the China-U.S. "security dilemma" would contribute to the operation of the "security dilemma" between China and its neighbors. Also, when the neighboring states choose to counterweigh China's power by enhancing their alliance with the United States and even enlisting U.S. deterrence, China will feel more insecure and hostile. Then the intervening operation of the inter-state "security dilemma" could aggravate China-U.S. "security dilemma".

To sum up, ASEAN's security is subject to the regional structural constraints created by both the state-induced and systemic inter-state security dilemmas. And the reaction of ASEAN countries will determine whether they will more deeply enmesh themselves in the dilemmas or they will be able to mitigate the dilemmas.

#### IV ASEAN'S STRATEGIC SECURITY CONCEPTIONS TOWARD BIG POWERS

##### (i) Small States and “Cooperative Security”

Contextualized in the given geopolitical environment in the region, ASEAN countries as small powers need to make full use of their wisdom to safeguard their national security.

As Hans H. Indorf said, “A small state, lacking physical superiority and an ability for flexible defence, has to rely on strategic insights, skills and tactics, to outwit an aggressor.”<sup>13</sup> It is true that small and weak states in a world of power will be able to better protect their national interests and to maximize their international influence, if they can design and pursue wise security strategies.

With democratization of the international politics and globalization of the world economy, the role of less powerful states has dramatically changed today and so has the means and strategic thinking for their security. After the Cold War, the concepts of “common security” and “cooperative security”, which rely on cooperation through norms and institution, have become prevalent.

The small powers are particularly enthusiastic about these neo-liberal and constructivist streams of security thinking, because of the following reasons.

First, common security or cooperative security, departing from the traditional concept of power politics, downplays the power role. It envisions that security does not merely rely on individual military defense power but on multi-dimensional and multilateral arrangements. It also rejects the notion of deterrence, containment and balance of power. In this light, security cannot be dictated by great powers and then it is more in hand of each state.

Second, the security architecture, in the concept of common security or cooperative security, is based on institution building. The process and outcome of institutionalization is a reflection of implementing the principle of equality and democracy. All states, large and small alike, enjoy equal participant status, have equal rights and say to formulate the international norms and rules, and share the equal responsibilities. Once the institution has been built, great powers can be equally regulated and constrained.

Third, common security or cooperative security emphasizes means of diplomacy, dialogues, cooperation and consultation, which encourages peaceful climate rather than military and political confrontation. Small and weak states can never afford to any international conflicts, in which they usually suffer the worst impacts. In this regard, they'll always seek to avoid confrontation.

Last, but not the least, common security or cooperative security tends to be the phenomenon of regionalism nowadays. It is in the interest of small powers as well as in their habit to rally together to maximize their strength and influence in the form of international organization or regime.

Therefore, it's not surprising that small powers are high on the concept of common security or cooperative security. ASEAN countries as small powers are no exception. They are the firm adherents of cooperative security.

#### **(ii) ASEAN's Strategic Security Visions and Objectives**

Ever since its inception, ASEAN has started its dream pursuit for regional security and peace. The core member states, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, which regard ASEAN as the cornerstone of their foreign policies, have collectively devoted their idealistic beliefs and values to ASEAN's strategic security visions.

ASEAN's strategic security visions are embodied in a series of ASEAN documents. Among others, *Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration* (1971), *Declaration of ASEAN Concord* (1976), *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia* (1976),

*Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone* (1995), *ASEAN Vision 2020* (1997), *Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation* (1999), *Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II)* (2003) are the most important intergovernmental agreements that express ASEAN's outlooks, aspirations and long-term pursued objectives.

Reviewing these documents, we can see the evolutionary construction of ASEAN's strategic security visions and particularly the great development in the wake of the Cold War. Three characteristics of their strategic visions can be identified.

First, ASEAN's strategic visions have been largely influenced and inspired by neo-liberalist and constructivist mind-set, which is in consistent with ASEAN's idealistic conception of cooperation and peace in essence. After the Cold War, as *Singapore Declaration Of 1992* declared, ASEAN seeks to "move towards a higher plane of political and economic cooperation to secure regional peace and prosperity". So we can find here that ASEAN aspires to shape the regional order constructively in the Neo-liberalist and Constructivist formulation. What ASEAN envisions now is not simply a **Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality** plus **Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone**, but a regional "security community", a far more lofty goal.

Second, ASEAN envisions a comprehensive scope of cooperative security to cope with conventional and non-conventional security problems in the region. ASEAN had been mostly preoccupied by the traditional security issues during the Cold War. In the new era, ASEAN desires to have progressive achievement in all security areas. *Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), 2003* proclaims, "An ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation that are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing for the purpose of ensuring durable peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region." So "ASEAN Community" is to be constructed with the aim to achieve the realization of **ASEAN Security Community**, **ASEAN Economic Community** and **ASEAN Socio-cultural Community** respectively.

Third, ASEAN's strategic security visions are not only inward-looking but also outward-looking. ASEAN envisages a region of peace, progress and prosperity founded on "national and ASEAN resilience" and "ASEAN Community". But since the end of the Cold War, ASEAN has also increasingly looked to the wider-ranged peaceful management relating to mega-regional security pressures. As *ASEAN Vision 2020* (1997) stated, "We see an outward-looking ASEAN playing a pivotal role in the international fora, and advancing ASEAN's common interests. We envision ASEAN having an intensified relationship with its Dialogue Partners and other regional organisations based on equal partnership and mutual respect." *Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation* (1999) further indicates, "the bright prospects for enhanced interaction and closer linkages in East Asia and recognized the fact that this growing interaction has helped increase opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with each other, thereby strengthening the elements essential, for the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the region".

These characteristics will be further demonstrated and analyzed in the following discussion.

Overall, ASEAN has gradually constructed its clearly defined idealistic strategic security visions and objectives, which create the sense of direction and meanwhile serve as the function of guidelines for the strategic planning of all member states.

### **(iii) ASEAN's Security Estimation and Threat Perceptions**

However, in the self-help international system, all states are instinctively pragmatic. Without doubt, ASEAN members "have a very strong commitment to pragmatism." Their security estimation and strategies are fundamentally determined by their realistic perceptions of threat.

To our common understanding, threat perceptions depend on two major sources: objective existence and subjective assessment. Objective existence is mostly related to capabilities and proximity, while subjective assessment is concerned about intentions. The first variable is tangible and calculable; therefore, it is easily identified. However, estimation of others' intangible intentions is much more uncertain and volatile. And subjective assessment, a psychological phenomenon, is affected by the synthesis of many factors, such as signaling information, past and recent historical experience and memory, cultural assumption, social emotion, political and ideological beliefs, etc.

The formation of ASEAN's perceptions of threat in the region is based on these two sources. Here I'd like to make a comparison of ASEAN's estimation of the security roles and weights of China and U.S.A. in the region.

#### China

- **Capabilities:** regional great power
- **Military power:** being modernized and posing a challenge
- **Economic power:** structurally competing with most core ASEAN countries; but providing enormous opportunity and drive for economic development
- **Political assertiveness:** sharing common politico-cultural beliefs and values with ASEAN; counterbalancing global unilateralism as an independent power
- **Proximity:** neighboring, sharing border with some ASEAN countries
- **Territorial dispute:** South China Sea
- **Historical experiences and memory of ASEAN countries toward China:** negative outweighing positive
  1. China in long past history: great civilization, but imperialistic and tribute-demanding
  2. China in recent history: a "politico-military threat" during the Cold War
- **Internal-Social Emotion of ASEAN countries:** Domestic ethnic relationship created stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and tendency of anti-Chinese sentiment.
- **Signals:** China's self-creating image is ambiguous.

1. Cooperative and accommodating behaviors: commitment to multilateralism
  2. “Bullying behaviors”: military posture in South China Sea dispute and in the Taiwan Issue
- 

*In sum, China’s “position” is uncertain and long-term intentions are unpredictable.*

#### The United States

- **Capabilities:** global superpower
  - **Military power:** supreme and stabilizing
  - **Economic power:** structurally complementary with ASEAN countries
  - **Political assertiveness:** politico-cultural differences
  - **Proximity:** geographically distant; no territorial claims in the region; deterring “regional power threats” and maintaining the “freedom of navigation” in South China Sea
  - **Historical experiences and memory of core ASEAN countries toward U.S.:** positive outweighing negative
    1. U.S. in past history: one of the colonial Western powers in the Philippines
    2. U.S. in recent history: protector and strong ally during the Cold War
  - **Internal-Social Emotion:** Sympathy with the Muslim brothers in the Middle East emotionally evoked some degree of anti American sentiment.
  - **Signals:** U.S. self-creating image is unilateralist and aggressive.
    1. Global unilateralist behaviors
    2. Preemptive military posture
- 

- **In sum,** U.S. is determined to maintain status-quo hegemonic power status and plays an offshore balancing role in the region.

(Main sources: a. Herbert Yee and Ian Storey (eds.), *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and reality* (New York: Routledge Courzon, 2002); b. Leonard C. Sebastian, “Southeast Asian Perceptions of China: the Challenge of Achieving a New Strategic Accommodation”, in Derek da Cunha (ed), *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*



(Singapore: ISEAS, 2000); c. Chin Kin Wah, “Regional Perceptions of China and Japan”, in Chandran Jeshurun (ed), *China, India, Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993); d. My interviews in Malaysia and Indonesia.)

From the above comparison, we may draw some conclusions on ASEAN’s basic threat perceptions vis-à-vis the big powers:

- 1) China is perceived as an “anticipated threat” whatsoever. For some ASEAN states, the threat is more potential than actual, due to China’s uncertain “position” and its unpredictable long-term intentions, while for others the threat is probably both actual and potential due to the ongoing territorial disputes. But on the other hand, China possesses its “positive elements”: for instance, it can provide enormous opportunity for economic benefits, counterbalance the global unilateralism as an independent political power and protect “Asian values” from the pressure of the Western politico-cultural “assimilation”, etc. Because of this positive side, ASEAN has developed the “dual perceptions” of China.
- 2) The United States is generally perceived as a “benign” stabilizing superpower in the region. Even though the U.S.’s image has changed slightly in recent years, yet it is considered merely as a “political trouble” at best and a “political and cultural threat” at worst, which is to great extent emotionally evoked.
- 3) On the whole, China, compared with the U.S., generates more uncertainty and more anxiety and thus has come to be a bigger security concern in the region. In another word, China “loom[s] large in the geopolitical considerations of all ASEAN states”<sup>14</sup>.

It should be accentuated here that such threat perceptions, shared by all ASEAN members to varying degree, have lingered through 1990s and have persisted up to the new century. The only difference between now and then is that in 1990s, especially before 1997, ASEAN officials and scholars were more explicit to articulate “China’s threat”, but now they are more cautious to countenance this proposition and prefer to replace the use of “security threat” with “security problem” or “security concern”. The ASEAN political leaderships in particular are more willing to highlight China’s positive

elements. Malaysian leaders even called China “an ally”. Nonetheless, it doesn’t change the nature of ASEAN’s threat perceptions in the region.

**(iv) ASEAN’s Strategic Conceptions vis-à-vis Big Powers**

With these threat perceptions, ASEAN countries have instinctually responded to the geopolitical challenges by employing the Realist politics, either bandwagoning or balancing. And as mentioned earlier, China-U.S. rivalry and competition makes ASEAN balancing politics possible.

ASEAN’s power-balancing conception in essence is to balance against perceived threat rather than the bigger power. So the balancing tactics that the core ASEAN countries designed is to “provide a limited deterrence against the PRC”. It has two components—internal balancing and external balancing: i.e. to strengthen armed forces and to facilitate U.S. and other external powers’ military presence in East Asia.<sup>15</sup> For these purposes, the military expenditures of many ASEAN countries have expanded in the last decades and a number of ASEAN countries have anxiously strengthened their military arrangements with the external powers, especially with the United States. Even Indonesia and Malaysia, notwithstanding their stance on non-alignment and neutrality, are no exceptions as to allow U.S. fleets to be serviced at their ship-repaired facilities in Surabaya and Lumut Naval Base, which is seen as the gesture of encouraging U.S. military continued presence in the region. One Indonesia scholar said, although U.S. is a political trouble in the region, its military presence is necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Vietnam, with ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards China, tries to consolidate its socialist nexus with China to combat the Western threat of “peaceful evolution” on the one hand, but hinges on ASEAN regional grouping as the balancing tool against China on the other.<sup>17</sup>

U.S. traditional military allies tend to bandwagon. Singapore is the “most enthusiastic supporter of the US military presence in East Asia, and has played a significant role in

facilitating that presence”, because the Singapore’s leadership deeply doubted that the region could take responsibility for its own security in the foreseeable future.<sup>18</sup> The Philippines, considering its asymmetric power in relation to China to scramble for the territories in South China Sea, has renewed its close military alliance with the United States, in an attempt to enlist the American deterrence to restrain the so-called “China bogey”.

**Figure 1 Military Expenditure of Core ASEAN Countries**

(In constant US dollars million)

| Country     | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997   | 1998         |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|--------------|
| Indonesia   | 2187 | 2354 | 2261 | 2499 | 2513 | 2772 | 3633   | 2767         |
| Malaysia    | 2044 | 2032 | 2159 | 2339 | 2444 | 2349 | 2322   | [2000](est.) |
| Thailand    | 2656 | 2987 | 3279 | 3311 | 3561 | 3552 | 3500   | 3234         |
| Singapore   | 2706 | 2875 | 2967 | 3068 | 3673 | 4026 | 4518   | [4803]       |
| Philippines | 854  | 861  | 969  | 1026 | 1187 | 1158 | [1364] | [1580]       |

(Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armament, Disarmament and International Security*, [London: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp.312-313)

**Figure 2 Defense Ties of Core ASEAN States with U.S.**

| Country     | Year | Type of Agreement   |
|-------------|------|---|
| Philippines | 1951 | Mutual Defense Treaty   |
|             | 1999 | Visiting Forcing Agreement  |
| Thailand    | 1951 | U.S. Mutual Security Act  |
| Singapore   | 1990 | Memorandum of Understanding allowing US rotational access to Singapore facilities |
| Brunei      | 1994 | Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Co-cooperation                             |
| Malaysia    | 1984 | Bilateral Training & Education Cooperation  |
| Indonesia   | 1992 | Facilities For U.S. naval repairs   |

(Based on Lam Peng Er, “Perceiving Japan: The View from Southeast Asia”, in Derek da Cunha, *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*, p.146.)

Despite the instinctive pragmatic response, ASEAN countries are clearly aware of the risk of increasing China's apprehension and aggravating China-U.S. relationship and thus refrain themselves from being over-indulgent in using the realistic approaches. Moreover, ASEAN's perception of threat regarding China is very often balanced by its perception of opportunity; so ASEAN countries are heedful that their balancing actions would not lead to the confrontation with China and consequently to the loss of the opportunity. Most importantly, ASEAN countries are increasingly unsatisfied with the situation in which their security destiny is determined by the big powers and their status and interests are always marginalized. Now they have the stronger wills than ever to take the lead in restructuring and managing the post-Cold War regional order for their common security, as explicitly indicated in their strategic security visions and objectives. Taken together, ASEAN countries, directed by their collective idealistic visions and objectives, have decided to seek other levels of approaches to the regional security.

Neo-liberalist institutionalism provides the conception for the second level of regional security architecture. Neo-liberalist institutionalism puts emphasis on the function of regime to restrain a state's action. It assumes that common security can be enhanced through code of conduct, institutionalization and collective measures. In light of this conception, ASEAN has created a multilateral security institution, namely ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Such an institution engages inclusively all powers that are concerned with their security interests in the region. The forum is designed to enable all the participants to achieve the consensus on a set of principles, norms and rules by discussing and compromising and subsequently abide by the commonly accepted code of conduct. ARF has worked out its Concept Paper so far, which aims to progress through three stages of security cooperation: confidence building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution mechanisms. And significantly, ASEAN has successfully ensured both China and the United States to get involved into ARF to address the regional security issues and formulate regulatory norms and rules, together with other countries.

Constructivist idea of "security community" has also been incorporated into ASEAN's strategic security-management conceptions. It serves as the third-level of

Lastly, ASEAN has successfully managed its balanced relationship with China and the United States so far. Due to ASEAN's engagement, both big powers have come to the common stance on favoring ASEAN's cooperative security conception and its commitment to the regional regime building. With respect to ARF, China is no longer skeptical of this multilateral mechanism and henceforth plays a positive role in the forum. The United States, although giving priority to its bilateral security system, has also expressed its support to ARF. For regional economic integration, China is obviously active to advance China-ASEAN economic cooperation and make its great commitment to APT mechanism building, while the United States, less guarded against the tendency of "Asianization" than before, is not open to object to ASEAN's idea of East Asian regionalism any more. More significantly, ASEAN has greatly developed its security partnership with China. The affinity is unprecedented, to the extent that China has acceded to ASEAN's TAC, accepting its norms and rules and is cooperative to resolve South China Sea dispute with ASEAN countries at the multilateral forum. It is true that the close interaction between two sides has lessened to great extent mutual mistrust and insecurity. The flashpoint in the region is more manageable today than in the previous years.

In sum, it is for sure that ASEAN's peaceful process along the line of cooperative security conception contributes to the regional security. It has affected the patterns of the regional international relationship basically shaped by the Realist conception and thus helped to mitigate rather than aggravate the security dilemmas in the region.

**(iii) ASEAN's Security Architecture: "Ascendant or Decadent?"**

As the role of ASEAN peaceful process is significant to the regional security, then there is a common concern about ASEAN's security architecture itself. Is it going to be ascendant or decadent? If it is able to move on and achieve the objectives, it is believed that the process will eventually change the structure and help escape the security dilemmas. Generally, the ASEAN people are confident about it, while others have less optimistic views.

From my observation, I would say that the security architecture is constrained by its structural shortcomings, which would bear on its ascending development.

The problematic basis is the weakest point of ASEAN security architecture above all. In another word, the security architecture is not and cannot be solidly founded. There are three problems concerning the basis.

First, when balance of power becomes the premise of ASEAN security architecture as well as the basic strategic objective of ASEAN's external security, it implies that all security issues resolving, norms formulating and institution building in the region need the participation of the big powers directly or indirectly. One Philippine scholar said, ARF "can only be possible in a regional balance of power established by continued U.S. military and political involvement in regional security affairs, particularly in view of the weakness of multilateral institutions in East Asia."<sup>25</sup> Equally, the regional multilateral mechanisms cannot be effective and the regional flashpoints cannot be resolved without China's presence and contributions. However, power balancing is not an easy game to play. As many ASEAN scholars pointed out, big powers are not reliable security guarantors and the dependence on one side means that there is price that needs to be paid. In this regard, the success of ASEAN security architecture is basically determined not by ASEAN countries themselves but by the big powers and the balance of their interests.

Second, ASEAN intends the security architecture to be self-reliant. It attempts to strengthen the individual military power and domestic economic resilience. However, the military budgets of ASEAN countries, constrained by their economic scale and development, can never be comparable to the regional major powers. So to increase military expenditure can only produce the side effect of spurring sub-regional arms race and worsening relationship among ASEAN neighbors themselves. Under this circumstance, not an ASEAN country feels that its own military strength is sufficient to strategically deter any threat from major powers. As a result, they still have to seek the balancing strength of external big powers. With respect to the economic resilience, the economies among ASEAN countries are more competitive than complementary

structurally speaking. The dynamics of their economic development, therefore, relies very much on the external bigger economies. When U.S. and EU are protectionism-prone, when Japan is struggling for its own economic growth, and when China is vigorously competing for FDI, technology and world export market, there is no doubt that the economic development of ASEAN countries will be greatly affected. It entails that ASEAN's security architecture on the basis of self-reliance is vulnerable to external challenges.

Third, material basis aside, ideational basis of ASEAN's security architecture is also weak. Whether institution building or security community constructing, they are all dependent on inter-subjective factors, among others, mutual confidence and shared identity. Confidence building is the preliminary step in ARF, while shared identity is the basic requirement for ASEAN community and East Asian Community. But as discussed above, the structural constraints created by security dilemmas pose inherent hindrance to confidence building. And for shared identity, as Amitav Acharya pointed out, ASEAN's "vision of community preceded rather than resulted from political, strategic and functional interactions and interdependence."<sup>26</sup> Even though ASEAN countries attempt to realize identity formation in "ASEAN Way"(informal, gradual, stress of 'process' rather than 'product'), the achievement, as some observers argued, "could be more superficial than the official proclamations". Lack of shared modern political culture, low-level of economic interdependence and competing national interests of 10 sovereign states still amount to weakening the constitution of shared identity. Besides, in the mega-region, the two major powers China and Japan remain deeply entangled in the systemic inter-state security dilemma, which creates huge obstacle to their identity constitution. Owing to such uncontrollable weaknesses at the basis, it is indeed uncertain that how far ASEAN can move its security architecture.

Another structural shortcoming of ASEAN security architecture that should not be disregarded is the devoid of leadership. The devoid is deliberately designed, in accordance with ASEAN's principles of equality and non-intervention. Inside ASEAN, Indonesia is a natural leader, in view of its size and population. But ASEAN's initial aim

was to constrain Indonesia from emerging as a hegemon in the sub-region and ASEAN has succeeded in doing so through the “associative” approach.<sup>27</sup> Now every ASEAN member is satisfied with Indonesia’s low posture in Southeast Asia, while Indonesia, as Dewi F. Anwar indicated, “does not like its low posture to be taken for granted. It is fully alive to the fact that stability within ASEAN has largely been due to Jakarta’s determination to be a responsible regional member and a good neighbour. Therefore, while Indonesia does not wish to lead ASEAN, it does not welcome any of the other members attempting to play that role either.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when ASEAN norms and approaches are applied to the whole East Asia, it is clear that ASEAN does not need any leadership either; instead, it intends to constrain the “hegemonic disposition” of bigger powers in the mega-region too. As a consequence, ASEAN security architecture is inclined to be equal and democratic, but at the same time it turns out to be less powerful and effective to fulfill the conception and objectives of cooperative security. Michael Leifer commented on ASEAN’s peace process as such, “ASEAN’s mode of activity...has never been directed to solving specific intra-mural problems.” He continued to say, as a diplomatic community, “[t]he Association has never been instrumental, however, in helping to devise and manage a peace process in the substantive sense”.<sup>29</sup> Of course, Michael Leifer is not alone to have such a view.

In the anarchic but interdependent international system, international security, the public goods, is always “everybody’s business” but finally will turn out to be “nobody’s business”, because “collective action dilemma” and “free-riding” phenomenon cannot be avoided. Therefore, leadership is needed to provide and manage the international public goods, such as to help norms-setting and institutions-building, to enforce the international regime and to shoulder major responsibility to maintain the international order. This is not to deny collective roles and efforts. But without leadership, the international community will have no strength and as a result no efficiency. In case of East Asian security, when leadership is devoid, the function and fruition of the security architecture is limited.

Taken together, it is certain that ASEAN security architecture, embodying its 3-level strategic security-management conceptions, is conducive to the regional security by



encouraging cooperative environment, norms setting and mechanisms building. But we should not forget that it remains to be constrained by the internal and external structural factors. Hence, there is doubt that ASEAN security architecture could lead to the realization of its idealistic strategic visions and objectives.

## VI STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND EAST ASIAN SECURITY IN PROSPECTS

### (i) Hegemonic System and International Security

If power politics and the security architecture as ASEAN constructively designed cannot help us escape the structural constraints created by security dilemmas in the region, what kind of security mechanism could be a better alternative for regional security?

Kenneth Waltz is perfectly right to point out, “Structural constraints cannot be wished away.” As he emphasized, “The only remedy for a strong structural effect is a structural change.” And there may be two ways to change structures: “changing the distribution of capabilities across units” and “imposing requirements where previously people had to decide for themselves”.<sup>30</sup>

In line with this idea, I would like to argue that the best way for East Asia to escape the security dilemmas and the structural constraints could be to change the power structure.

Theoretically, hegemonic system has the possibility to overcome the problems of security dilemma. Hegemony carries different meanings to different people. But the original meaning in old Greek is leadership and dominance. It should be noted that hegemony is different from hegemonism or imperialism. Hegemonism implies the intention to control over other countries, while “the key distinction between hegemony and imperialism is that a hegemon, unlike an empire, does not dominate societies through a cumbersome political superstructure, but rather supervises the relationships between politically independent societies.”<sup>31</sup> It should be accentuated here that in the modern

world as today, a hegemonic system does not at all mean that the lesser powers will lose their sovereignty and political identities.

In a hegemonic system, the power structure is pyramidal and hierarchical, where the hegemon is the most powerful state. When other lesser powers consider that the hegemon is too strong to be challenged, they would rather bandwagon. Especially, when most of the states decide to bandwagon and enjoy the free-riding benefits, the rest would have to follow in order to share the benefits and avoid being targeted as a threat by the hegemon if they do otherwise. Under this circumstance, threat perceptions of states could change and the systemic security dilemma between the hegemon and other states may not operate, unless the hegemon itself induces a dilemma, as discussed earlier. In this situation, mutual uncertainty and insecurity could be escaped. As military and political competition was lessened or checked at a minimum low level, states would be concerned more with absolute gains than with the relative gains. Then cooperation will be more possible and constant.

Theory of Hegemonic Stability (THS) upholds the hegemonic system from the perspective of the positive role of a hegemon in the system. It assumes that a hegemonic power has the will and capabilities to maintain the global political and economic order and thus the world system will be stable. The same theory should be applicable to regional hegemonic stability.

However, a hegemonic system is not without problems. First, hegemony, as its definition implies, has the tendency of hegemonism and unilateralism. Second, there is the danger of the state-induced security dilemma. These problems would cause anxiety of lesser powers and as a result they would lead to the tendency of balancing. Having this in mind, I believe that hegemonic power structure is obviously not sufficient to guarantee the international security and therefore other mechanisms are definitely needed as a complementary tool to overcome the shortcomings of the hegemonic power structure.

**(ii) The Possibility of the Chinese Hegemony in the Region**

Then how can we relate the above theoretical point of view to the reality in East Asia? The point I'd like to highlight here is that we need the hegemonic power structure in the region.

In the future of East Asia, there is indeed the possibility of structural change, i.e. the emergence of the Chinese hegemony. The possibility depends on two variables.

The first and prerequisite one is the sustaining fast development of China's capabilities. As mentioned above, China is a pole in the region but not yet matched by its capabilities. If China continues to grow at the current pace, there is no doubt that it will possess the capabilities of a superpower or a hegemon eventually.

The second factor is the identity constructing. In spite of the material condition, the role of a hegemon and the function of a hegemonic system cannot possibly operate if the states do not want to make of it or even deny it. Therefore, the ideational condition is equally critical to the emergence of a new power structure. The identity of a hegemon needs to be inter-subjectively constructed by both China and other countries in the region. But at present, most states in the region are anxious and accordingly busy with devising and using every possible means to avoid China's potential dominance in the region, let alone to accept the concept of China's hegemony, whereas China itself has consistently stated that it will never seek hegemony. As Alan Collins exactly captured the point that "what the Chinese mean by hegemony is not the same as the Western definition." China actually equates it with imperialism.<sup>32</sup> So we can find here that a major obstacle confronting the structural change is actually states' identification.

However, this ideational obstacle is not insurmountable. First of all, threat perceptions can be changed and remolded. Joseph Nye said in 1995, "if you treat China as an enemy, China will become an enemy". Similarly, if we look at China as a hegemon, it would be a hegemon. As constructivists believe, "Distribution of Power is what states

make of it”. Especially if the circumstance has changed, i.e. China has become a real superpower, the neighboring states would be more likely to change their perceptions and adopt the bandwagoning politics. As Stephen Walt asserted, “states are attracted to strength. The more powerful the state and the more clearly this power is demonstrated, the more likely others are ally with it.”<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, as David C. Kang aptly argued, history and cultural factors sometimes would work to make states behave in “abnormal” way.<sup>34</sup> The age-old Chinese history of hegemony in the region has provided a reference for the neighboring states to think about the future of the regional order. Many officials and scholars in ASEAN countries are familiar with the long Chinese history, especially with the Chinese tributary system, which is conceived as a classical version of a hegemonic system. The system has impressed the people with two sides: negative and positive. On the one hand, it was an unequal political system with China’s suzerainty over neighboring countries in the system; but on the other, it was not an unacceptable hegemonic system where a strong and prosperous China did not occupy the territories of other countries but fostered trading and played a benign role to “stabilise the status quo”<sup>35</sup> through exerting diplomatic and cultural influence and of course occasionally punishing the rebels. The historical reference is significant, because the Chinese hegemony in the future could be thus reached within people’s imagination and then they will not otherwise give loose to their imagination so rampant as to increase their fear. Even though history will not repeat itself, it sometimes will replicate itself in different context and in different version. In this regard, the key element to overcome the ideational obstacle lies in whether the negative image of the Chinese hegemony can be changed.

The traditional political culture in East Asia may also suggest that the notion of the Chinese hegemony in the future will not absolutely impossible. It is true that the Westphalian norms of sovereignty, equality and non-interference have already been integrated into Asian political culture, but it should be noted too that the conceptions of “hierarchy order” and the social tradition of “bandwagoning” are still deeply rooted in Asian traditional political culture. In history, many East Asian countries could accept

China's tributary system, "basically in awe, but not in fear"<sup>36</sup>, when they thought China deserved it and most importantly they could gain the economic profits. Even in case of Vietnam, its long history of bandwagoning China should not be obscured or buried by its experiences of revolt against China. For the time being, we can also see that many East Asian countries are comfortable and even happy to accept the American hegemony.

Among ASEAN countries, it is not surprising that Indonesia will be the strongest opponent to the notion of the Chinese hegemony. Dewi F. Anwar has expressed her Indonesian view that "as a major proponent of open regionalism, ASEAN will ensure that while aiming for a more autonomous regional order the region remains open to the outside world, preventing the rise of any one country dominating the region or attempting to exclude others."<sup>37</sup> Indonesia's position is understandable, because it is a big power in the sub-region and has its own concentric world, where Southeast Asia is considered as its first and primary circle. However, as indicated earlier, when most of the states decide to bandwagon and enjoy the free-riding benefits, the rest are likely to follow and accept the reality.

### **(iii) East Asian Community in the Hegemonic System**

Having said that, we may come to the core issue now: how can we change China's old negative image and check the negative tendency of the hegemon in the future so as to guarantee that the hegemonic system will operate in a positive way? A number of Malaysian and Indonesian scholars expressed the view that even though ASEAN countries do not negate the possibility of accepting the Chinese hegemony in the future, they need to have their influence on the process. Such a view carries the concern over this core issue.

My suggestion is that East Asian states should creatively construct the East Asian Community in the hegemonic system, where ASEAN countries will continue to play a crucial role and surely impose their influence on the process.

The first step and the most significant creative construction for this security community is identity reconstitution—to change the threat perceptions and achieve a consensus on making of a responsible, self-disciplined, cooperative hegemonic power. The success to building up such a benevolent and respectful hegemonic image and correspondingly achieving the common identification relies on the internal and external fulfillments: self-improvement of the hegemon and realization of the regulatory mechanism building in the region.

Self-improvement of the hegemon is important, because other states will make the subjective assessments and form or change their perceptions according to its self-creating image and the signals it sends out. For the self-improvement, China is evidently progressing, although the improvement is far from enough. States are believed to have the wisdom of emulation in the competitive world. They not only learn lessons from history, but also copy or follow the lead of advanced countries. The same is true of China. Since China opened up its door to the World and the World opened up its door to China, China has started to learn internally how to emulate the Western model to “modernize” itself including political “modernization” and externally how to position itself, accommodate to the World and become a responsible member. So China’s image in the world is changing to a positive light. More importantly, the Chinese leadership of new generation comes up to the power in a peaceful time and governs the country in a relative peaceful and open world. In this regard, they are more condescending and more responsive to the public opinions. In view of this evolutionary trend, we have reason to believe that China will move on for further self-improvement.

Equally important, international norms and institution are needed to supervise, regulate and constrain the hegemon. ASEAN’s mechanism building and security community constructing in the region has laid down the foundation. And ASEAN still continues to push the process moving forward.

Once the identity of China’s leadership can be constituted in the region and China is ensured that the multilateral institution is not the instrument used against it, rather, for its

own interest, then China will have more sense of commitment and responsibility, to help advance the mechanism building and maintain the regional order through this mechanism. Simultaneously, when the hegemon is integrated into the process of the mechanism building and the regulatory mechanism can operate in the substantive way, then the hegemon's behavior can be more effectively managed. By that time, there will be a promising prospect for realizing a Security Community with hegemonic leadership, regulatory norms and institutions, integrated economy and shared political culture in East Asia. And long-term peace and prosperity in the region is more at hand.

It should be mentioned that if East Asia is stable, prosperous and open, if the American interests in the region are well taken care of, it is not impossible that the United States will be more than happy to accept the new regional order in East Asia, because it is the biggest beneficiary as a global hegemon.

## VII CONCLUSIONS

1. It is China-U.S. relationship in East Asian Region that creates the regional security environment.
2. Although subject to the structural constraints, ASEAN countries try to use their leverage as much as they can to “modify the rules of the system to suit their own interests”.
3. ASEAN security architecture, embodying its three level strategic security-management conceptions, is conducive to the regional security by encouraging cooperative environment, norms setting and mechanisms building. But it remains to be constrained by the internal and external structural factors. Hence, there is doubt that ASEAN security architecture could lead to the realization of its idealistic strategic visions and objectives. ASEAN’s cooperative security practice can affect the process of the international relationship in the region but cannot help escape the structural constraints.
4. The possible remedy is to change power structure and creatively construct the security community in a hegemonic system.



## Notes

1. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: the national security problem in international relations*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p.1.
2. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979).
3. Robert S. Ross, "Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century", *International Security*, Vol.23, No.4, (Spring, 1999), p.81.
4. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.130.
5. See the details in Robert Ross, "Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century", pp.81-118.
6. Peter Van Ness, "Hegemony, Not Anarchy: why China and Japan are not balancing US unipolar power", *Working Paper 2001/4* (ANU, Canberra: Department of International Relations, 2001).
7. Robert Ross, "Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century", p.84.
8. About the definition and its evolution of a state-induced security dilemma, see Alan Collins, *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia*, pp.10-13.
9. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.128.
10. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.180.
11. Bandwagoning here in Stephen Walt's definition "refers to alignment with source of danger". (See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.17.)
12. See the details in Collins, *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia*, pp.89-129.
13. Hans H. Indorf, *Strategies for Small-State Survival* (Malaysia: ISIS, 1985), p.7.
14. Ian Storey, "Singapore and the Rise of China: Perceptions and policy", in Herbert Yee & Ian Storey, *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality* (New York: Routledge Curzon), p.206.
15. Ibid, p.219.
16. According to my interview in Jakarta, Indonesia, October 2004.
17. Charlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Perspectives of the 'China Threat'", in Herbert Yee & Ian Storey, *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality*, p.282.
18. Ian Storey, "Singapore and the Rise of China: Perceptions and Policy", p.220.
19. See the details in Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2001).
20. Daljit Singh, "Evolution of the Security Dialogue Process in the Asia-Pacific Region", in Dereck da Cunha, *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*, p.42.
21. Renato Cruz De Castro, "Managing 'Strategic Unipolarity'", in Dereck da Cunha, *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*, p.73.
22. See Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia", *International Security*, Vol.18, No.3 (winter 1993/1994), pp.5-33; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Europe's

- Past, Asia's Future?" SAIS Policy Forum Series, No.3 (October 1998); Barry Buzan & Gerald Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security", *Survival*, Vol.36, No.2 (Summer 1994), pp.3-21.
23. See Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'Constraint' of China", *International Security*, Vol.20, No.4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107-135.
  24. See Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?", *International Security*, Vol.28, No.3, (Winter 2003/04), pp.149-164.
  25. Renato Cruz De Castro, "Managing 'Strategic Unipolarity'", in Dereck da Cunha, *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*, p.68.
  26. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p.195.
  27. See Ralf Emmers, *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
  28. Dewi F. Anwar, "Changes and Continuity in Indonesia's Regional Outlook", in Chandran Jeshurun (ed.), *China, India Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993), p.232.
  29. See Michael Leifer, "The ASEAN peace process: a category mistake", *The Pacific Review*, Vol.12, No.1, 1999, pp.25-38.
  30. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp.108-111.
  31. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.45.
  32. Alan Collins, *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia*, p.137.
  33. Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.20.
  34. There is a debate between Amitav Acharya and David C. Kang on the role of history and cultural factors in ASEAN's possible reactions to China's rise. See David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks", *International Security*, Vol. 27, No.4 (Spring 2003), pp.57-85; Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?", *International Security*, Vol. 28, No.3 (Winter 2003/04), pp.149-164; David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations", *International Security*, Vol. 27, No.4 (Spring 2003), pp.165-180.
  35. Wang Gungwu, "China's Place in the Region: The Search for Allies and Friends", *The Indonesian Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No.4 (Fourth Quarter 1997), p.421.
  36. Leonard C. Sebastian, "Southeast Asian Perceptions of China", in Derek da Cunha, *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*, p.162.
  37. Dewi F. Anwar, "Indonesia and Asia's Future", essay to celebrate 10th anniversary of USINDO, 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: the national security problem in international relations*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p.1.

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