Cooperation for Competition: China's Approach to Regional Security in East Asia

Li Mingjiang

China is a giant in Asia. The phenomenal economic growth over the past three decades has empowered the nation to play a much larger role in East Asian regional affairs. With the growth of Chinese power and influence, observers throughout the world are now contemplating what impact China's rise is likely to have on the future international relations and regional security in East Asia. The views are very diverse and in many regards oppositional.

Pessimists believe that China's increasing influence in Asia will have grave negative consequences for the East Asian regional order and security.[1] They believe that China's regional security policy has centred on an attempt to expand its strategic and security influence at the expense of other major powers. They are generally suspicious of China's long term strategic goals. Many of these pessimistic assessments are also based on the fact that China is involved in many hotspot security problems in East Asia, for instance, the Taiwan issue, territorial contentions with Japan in the East China Sea, and disputes in the South China Sea. This school of thought is usually associated with the realist paradigm. Analysts in this school tend to highlight the competitive aspects in China's regional security affairs and, as a result, describe China's behaviours as part of a zero-sum

[1] Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World* (Encounter Books, 2001); Wayne Bert, *The United States, China and Southeast Asian Security: A Changing of the Guard?* (University of British Columbia, 2005); Randall Doyle, *America and China: Asia-Pacific Rim Hegemony in the 21st Century* (Lexington Books, 2007); Robert G. Sutter, *China's Rise in Asia: Promises and Perils* (Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, 2005); Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'Constrainment' of China", *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107-135; Aaron Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, vol. 18, no.3, Winter 1993/94, pp. 5-33.

game in East Asian international relations.

Another group of analysts tends to view China as an actor for stability in the region and partner for other states.[2] Using the liberal institutionalist approach, they focus on China's efforts in improving bilateral relations with its neighbours and intensifying economic interdependence, its moderate approach to security and territorial disputes in the region, and its active participation in regional institutions since the mid-1990s. David C. Kang, for instance, provides a provocative view on Asia's future by saying that East Asia's future will resemble its past: Sino-centric, hierarchical, and reasonably stable.[3]

A third school of thought, largely employing the social constructivist approach, has focused on the cognitive processes of socialisation in China's interactions with regional actors and the norms in regional international relations.[4] These analysts tend to believe that China's policy on regional security has been mainly cooperative and positive because the process of social learning has helped Chinese decision makers change their previous negative perception of the regional political and security environment. While this group of scholars more or less acknowledge the positive transformation in China's security policy in East Asia since the end of the Cold War, they do not offer clear-cut predictions about China's security posture and role in various regional security issues in the future.

---

[2] David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order", *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, Winter 2004/05; Evan Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 6, Nov/Dec 2003; Morton Abramowitz and Stephen Bosworth, "Adjusting to the New Asia", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 4, July/August 2003; Zhang Yunling and Tang Shiping, "China's Regional Strategy", in David Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (California: University of California Press, 2005).

[3] David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

[4] Alastair Iain Johnston and Paul Evans, "China's Engagement with Multilateral Security Institutions", in Alastair Iain Johnstong and Robert Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 235-72; G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China: Power, Institutions, and the Western Order", in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?" *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 3, Winter 2003-04, pp. 149-64; Alice D. Ba, "Who's socializing whom? Complex engagement in Sino-ASEAN relations", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 2006.

In this paper, however, I argue that using any single theoretical approach to examine China's regional security policy is insufficient for our understanding of the essence of China's policy in the past two decades. Observing China's security policy through any single theoretical framework obscures the reality and complexity in China's security strategy in East Asia. I contend that in practice, China has essentially learned to employ liberal institutional and social constructivist means for realist purposes. In other words, China has been able to compete with other major actors for influence and to secure its security interests in East Asia through cooperative means, which in most cases were deemed benign by most countries in the region. In addition to the introduction, this paper contains two main parts. In part one, I briefly introduce the security environment that China faced and China's perception of its security challenges in the early 1990s. Part 2 analyses China's regional policy since the mid-1990s. I explain how China adopted its security strategy: cooperation for competition. In the conclusion, I briefly dwell on the policy implications for regional states and external powers.

China's Perception of Its Post-Cold War Security Environment

The end of the Cold War brought no relief or excitement for China as it did for much of the rest of the world. Coupled with the tragic event at Tiananmen in the summer of 1989, the collapse of the Cold War posed a serious challenge to China's security in the early 1990s. China's security environment dramatically worsened in much of the 1990s as compared to the previous decade. Being the only major socialist state and in the aftermath of the Tiananmen suppression, China was viewed with much distrust by the Western world. In fact, for much of the 1990s, Beijing was politically isolated.

In East Asia, China also began to face a totally different security environment. This was the case largely because of US security posture and realignment in the region.[5] Initially, Chinese

[5] This section draws from Li Mingjiang, "China's Proactive Engagement in Asia: Economics, Politics and Interactions", RSIS working paper, no. 134, July 2007.

anxiety originated from US-led international sanctions and the perennial scrutiny of China's human-rights record in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen suppression. Top CCP leaders believed that the United States was poised to politically "Westernise" China and "split" China by blocking its reunification efforts with Taiwan and meddling in Tibet. A flurry of unfortunate episodes in Sino-US relations in the 1990s—the US Congress's moves to block China's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games in 1993, NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the collision of a US EP-3 spy plane with a Chinese jet fighter in April 2001—also reinforced the Chinese perception that Washington would not hesitate to adopt a coercive approach towards China under certain circumstances.

A particular concern for the Chinese leaders is Washington's efforts to maintain and enhance its bilateral alliances with many of China's neighbouring states. Beijing clearly understands that dominance of its neighbouring areas by the United States would not only significantly circumscribe China's role in regional affairs but also, more importantly, militate against China's modernisation drive. China has been particularly apprehensive of the strengthening of the US-Japan security alliance since 1996. With growing scepticism in Japan's continued commitment to a peaceful foreign policy, Beijing took special umbrage at the new treaty's call for Japan to assume greater responsibilities in crisis situations in Japan's periphery, claiming that the change in US-Japan alliance was targeted at China.[6]

At the beginning of this century, many Chinese elite still believed that they have good reason to be wary of US intentions. Annual reports by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a bipartisan body established by the US Congress, have continuously depicted China as challenging the United States economically, politically and militarily, particularly in Asia.[7] Former president George W. Bush's perception of China

[6] Zhang Guocheng, "*Ling Ren Guanzhu De Xin Dongxiang: Ri Mei Xiugai Fangwei Hezuo Fangzhen Chuxi*" [New Moves Worth Watching: A Preliminary Analysis of the Revisions of Japan-US Defence and Cooperation Guidelines], *People's Daily*, 14 June 1997.

[7] USCC (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission), *Report to Congress of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 2002, available online at www.uscc.gov.

as a "strategic competitor" in 2001, when he first came to power—particularly his pledge to protect Taiwan militarily—further contributed to China's anxiety over the United States's strategy towards China. China has paid close attention to Washington's and, to some extent, Japan's moves to woo India and Australia into some sort of loose strategic alliance to constrain China. Beijing is also concerned with the fact that the United States has expanded its defence and security ties with some Southeast Asian nations, including Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, all in the name of anti-terrorism. Many Chinese analysts suspect that Washington desires to gain predominance in Southeast Asia under the pretext of counter-terrorism.[8]

Most Chinese observers concur that these US moves are designed to create structural restraints to China's influence in East Asia and that the US security challenge is the biggest variable in China's Asian policy. A popular argument by many Chinese analysts is that the United States has been pursuing a two-pronged strategy towards China in the post-Cold War era. On the one hand, Washington is keen to develop commercial ties with China in order to benefit from China's economic growth and seek cooperation with China on major international traditional or non-traditional security issues. On the other hand, Washington has evidently pursued a hidden or partial containment policy or, according to more moderate observers, a dual strategy of engagement and containment, to curb China's influence.[9] Others regard US strategic moves in Asia as a de facto encirclement of China. For instance, even when there were already significant improvements in China's security situation in the region by 2003, some Chinese analysts still argued that China was essentially encircled by the United States.[10]

---

[8] Saw Swee-Hock et al., "An Overview of ASEAN-China Relations" in Saw Swee-Hock et al., eds., *ASEAN-China Relations: Realities and Prospects* (Singapore: ISEAS Publications, 2005), p6.

[9] Wu Guoguang and Liu Jinghua, "Containing China: Myth and reality" [*Weidu Zhongguo: Shenhua Yu Xianshi*], *Strategy and Management* [*Zhanlue Yu Guanli*], no. 1 (1996); Niu Jun and Lan Jianxue, "*Zhongmei Guanxi Yu Dongya Heping*" [Sino-US Relations and East Asia Peace], in Yan Xuetong and Jin Dexiang, eds., *Dong Ya Heping Yu Anquan* [Peace and Security in East Asia] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2005), p47; Rosalie Chen, "China Perceives America: Perspectives of International Relations Experts", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 35, 2003.

[10] Tang Xizhong et al., *Zhongguo Yu Zhoubian Guojia Guanxi* [China's Relations with Neighbouring States] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2003).

These pessimistic views are reportedly shared by top Chinese leaders as well. Former vice-premier Qian Qichen opined in October 2002 that the United States was strengthening its containment moves against China and that Washington would never change its dual strategy towards China.[11] President Hu Jintao, reportedly in a private conversation, warned that the United States had "strengthened its military deployments in the Asia-Pacific region, strengthened the US-Japan military alliance, strengthened strategic cooperation with India, improved relations with Vietnam, inveigled Pakistan, established a pro-American government in Afghanistan, increased arms sales to Taiwan, and so on." He added: "They have extended outposts and placed pressure points on us from the east, south, and west. This makes a great change in our geopolitical environment."[12]

The "China threat" thesis that was quite popular in the United States in the 1990s also found its receptive audience in China's East Asian neighbourhood, in particular in Southeast Asia where many of these smaller states had experienced enmity and even hostility with China during the Cold War era. In addition, there were territorial disputes between China and a few Southeast Asian nations in the South China Sea. In fact, the frictions between China and the Philippines in the mid-1990s in the South China Sea significantly added to the strategic apprehensions of neighbouring states with regard to China's long term security behaviour in the region. Beijing was essentially concerned that some other small neighbours might be tempted to closely engage with Washington to constrain China's security role and influence in the region. China also understood that in order to dampen the "China threat" rhetoric it would be a better strategy to work on those small neighbouring countries to convince them that China intended to be a benign power.

On top of all the political and security concerns, Chinese leaders were obviously first and foremost worried about the domestic economic growth, the most crucial factor in sustaining the legitimacy of the ruling elite in the reform era. Chinese decision

[11] Qian Qichen, "The Post-September 11 International Situation and Sino-US Relations", *Xuexi Shibao* [Study Times] (Beijing: Central Party School, October 2002), p. 6.

[12] Andrew J. Nathan and Bruce Gilley, *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files* (London: Granta, 2003), pp207-208; cited in Rosemary Foot, "China's Regional Activism".

makers believed that having a stable and peaceful regional environment was a prerequisite for them to concentrate on domestic economic modernisation. East Asia was also regarded as one of the most important regions for the success of China's export-led economic growth. East Asian nations have been China's indispensable markets, source of foreign direct investment, and source of energy and raw material supplies.

China's Security Approach in East Asia: Cooperation for Competition

In light of the challenging security situation in East Asia, China had basically three major options. First, it could use its hard power and adopt a hardline approach to confront the United States and its allies and coerce regional states to remain either neutral or closer to China. Second, China could attempt to come up with various proposals to shape the structure of the security environment in East Asia to sabotage US preponderance. The third option is to work within the existing regional security system in an attempt to maximise Chinese security interests. For the first option, China really did not give it much thought. Sober-minded Chinese decision makers clearly understood that it was simply a non-starter given the huge disparity of national power between China and the United States in the 1990s. The former leader Deng Xiaoping's dictum of maintaining a "low profile" international posture was a clear indication of this kind of strategic thinking. For the second option, China did make some efforts to reconfigure the security relationships in East Asia. For instance, in the late 1990s, China pushed for a "new security concept" which emphasises equality, mutual trust, dialogue, confidence-building, and institutionalised multilateralism. Part of the purpose was to weaken US-dominated security alliance arrangements in Asia. Nevertheless, so far, the Chinese effort in reshaping regional security structure through major reform measures has had very little effect. What Beijing essentially focused on doing was the third option: fostering and strengthening cooperative relationships under the existing regional system in order to better compete with the US and other major powers.

The cooperative aspect of China's regional security strategy has been demonstrated in improving bilateral relations with almost

all neighbouring countries, maintaining normal working relations with other major powers, active participation in various regional institutions and multilateralism, downplaying territorial disputes, participating and even taking the lead in various regional economic cooperation projects, providing preferable loans and assistances to neighbouring nations, and engaging regional states in non-traditional security issues.

It is worth emphasising that China's relations with its neighbours have never been better since the mid-20th century. Many scholars believe that China has essentially used its soft power to achieve this goal.[13] While there is still significant strategic rivalry and political distrust in China's relations with Japan and India, the two bilateral relationships are steadily moving forward. Beijing has consistently applied its policy of cultivating cooperative relations to all regional states regardless of the extent of their security ties with the United States or whether they have territorial disputes with China. For bigger neighbouring countries, economic interests served as the glue in their relations with China. For those smaller and less developed states, Chinese financial and other assistance programs were very attractive. Due to various reasons, we are not sure about the full extent of China's overseas development aid, but two sets of numbers might reveal the tip of the iceberg in China's assistance in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, China provided at least US$800 million in 2005 and 2006, with most of the money being used for infrastructure and hydropower projects.[14] China has proffered US$1.8 billion to the Philippines on various development projects and will provide US$6 to 10 billion in loans over the next three to five years to finance infrastructure projects in the country.[15] In October 2009, at the 12th China-ASEAN summit in Thailand, China pledged to set up a US$10 billion China-ASEAN

[13] Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (Yale University Press, 2007); Mingjiang Li, ed., *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2009); and Thomas Lum, Wayne Morrison, and Bruce Vaughn, "China's 'Soft Power' in Southeast Asia", Congressional Research Service report for US Congress, January 4, 2008.

[14] Elizabeth Mills, "Unconditional Aid from China Threatens to Undermine Donor Pressure on Cambodia", *Global Insight*, 7 June, 2007.

[15] *Business World*, Manila, 3 January 2008.

Investment Fund and extend US$15 billion of loans to ASEAN countries.[16] Over the years, Beijing also provided quite substantial assistance to the less developed neighbouring countries in areas such as human resources, agricultural production, infrastructure, education, and public health.

In the early 1990s, China was very suspicious of various regional multilateral institutions, viewing them as mainly the political tools of the United States. Even ASEAN was regarded as a partially anti-China grouping. After several years of cautious participation in various regional multilateral forums in the second half of the 1990s, Beijing realised that its previous perceptions of East Asian regional institutions were not accurate. Chinese officials began to understand that China's participation in those multilateral activities was helpful in reducing the "China threat" rhetoric in its neighbourhood and creating a more benign China image. Moreover, China found that it could use those regional institutions to better protect its national security interests. For example, at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), China found that many smaller states in East Asia shared its position of opposition to setting up formal preventive diplomacy mechanisms in international crisis management in the region. This has helped China diffuse the political and diplomatic pressures from those active proponents of preventive diplomacy, primarily the United States.

Over the years, China has taken a proactive stance on bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation. China has worked hard to push for bilateral FTAs with various East Asian states, e.g. South Korea and Japan, and at the same time has also strenuously pushed for economic collaborations at the multilateral level. In 2001, Beijing proposed an FTA with ASEAN together with some flexible measures such as the early harvest scheme. This move is widely believed to be partially driven by the Chinese political goal of reassuring ASEAN countries of China's benevolence and further defusing the "China threat" rhetoric in the region. There are also other multilateral projects in Southeast Asia in which China plays an active role, for instance, the Greater Mekong River Sub-

[16] http://www.china-asean.gov.cn/html/news/info/2010/2010128/201012842873.html, (accessed January 25, 2010).

region project and the emerging Pan-Beibu (Tonkin) Gulf regional economic zone. In Northeast Asia, China is also engaged in a number of multilateral economic projects, such as the Tumen River regional development initiative and the Bohai economic circle. China is also enthusiastic about a trilateral FTA among China, South Korea, and Japan in Northeast Asia.

China has cooperated extensively on non-traditional security issues with other countries in Asia. Bilaterally with ASEAN, in 2000, China signed an action plan with ASEAN on countering drug trafficking. In 2000, China participated in the Chiang Mai Initiative for East Asian cooperation on financial security. In 2001, China, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand held a ministerial-level meeting on fighting drug trafficking and publicised the Beijing Declaration. In 2002, China and ASEAN signed a joint declaration on cooperation in non-traditional security area, which specified issues of cooperation between the two sides, drug trafficking, human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, arms trafficking, money laundering, other international economic crimes, and crimes through the internet. In the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) that China and ASEAN signed in 2002, China pledged to cooperate with various parties concerned on marine environmental protection, search and rescue, and anti-piracy. In 2003, China and ASEAN held a special summit meeting to tackle SARS and initiated a cooperation mechanism on public health. In 2004, China signed a MOU with ASEAN on NTS cooperation, which further emphasised the need for Sino-ASEAN cooperation on NTS matters.

On thorny issues regarding territorial disputes, China has taken a significantly different approach as compared to its policies before the mid-1990s. Take China's approach to the South China Sea (SCS) dispute as an example. Chinese policy and behaviour in the South China Sea since the mid-1990s have been described as "considerable restraint."[17] It is largely a soft power approach. On one hand, China, like other disputants, never explicitly abandoned its sovereignty claim. On the other hand, there have also been important changes in China's approach, which include gradually engaging in multilateral negotiations in the late 1990s, stronger

[17] Shee Poon Kim, "The South China Sea in China's Strategic Thinking", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, March 1998; 19, 4.

eagerness to push for the proposal of "shelving disputes and joint exploitation", and accepting moral as well legal restraints on the SCS issue. These changes are reflected in China's signing of the DOC, its accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and various joint actions with other disputant countries in the South China Sea, for instance, the joint resource exploration program conducted with Vietnam and the Philippines.

The same moderate approach also applies to the East China Sea dispute with Japan and the Taiwan issue. In the East China Sea, the diplomatic contentions have been tense between China and Japan, but Beijing has consistently argued for "joint development" of oil and natural gas in the area with Japan. In fact, the two governments signed an in-principle agreement to jointly exploit the resources in the East China Sea. For the Taiwan issue, since the mid-1990s, mainland China has quite strongly pushed for economic ties across the Taiwan Strait. In recent years, particularly since the KMT came to power in March 2008, cross-strait relations have seen dramatic improvements, both in the socio-political and economic arenas. It looks like Beijing has become more willing to deal with the Taiwan issue from a status quo basis.

In international relations, no nation is altruistic. China is no exception. All the above-mentioned cooperative means were aimed at achieving various strategic and security goals. Over the past two decades, Beijing has consistently attempted to compete against the possibility of containment or constrainment led by the US, compete for a better China image in the region, compete to create a more propitious regional environment for its domestic economic development, compete with other major powers, especially the US and Japan, for regional influence, and compete to consolidate a long term solid strategic position in the region.

All the above strategic and security goals centre on the question of how to cope with American dominance in the region and hedge against possible future US efforts at containment using China's neighbours. Through active participation in regional institutions, China competes to show it is more supportive of Asian interests and initiatives than the US. In some ways China appears more of a supporter of the status quo in Asia than the United States. Washington's aid to regional states is often accompanied by demands for liberal democratic reforms, whereas China makes no such demands. Indeed, China's strict concept of sovereignty

and non-interference is more compatible with regional values, particularly in Southeast Asia.

China's regional economic cooperation has placed it in perhaps the best position to compete for a long-term strategic position in the region. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement is likely to further link the economies of Southeast Asian states to China, giving the latter more influence in the region. Chinese officials have talked about reorienting their economy and increasing domestic consumption, which would provide a vast market for Southeast Asia-produced goods. Moreover, through the various regional cooperative projects noted above, China is putting in place the infrastructure to facilitate trade with regional states, as well as increase regional tourism and communication, further tying the region together

Conclusions

In the post-Cold War years, in response to various security challenges in East Asia, Beijing adopted a regional strategy that could be best characterised as "cooperation for competition". Beijing understood that to retain a solid strategic position in its neighbouring regions in the long run, China would have to focus on domestic economic growth. This understanding necessitated a regional approach of using international policy to serve the imperatives of its domestic economic agenda. Chinese efforts in solving land border disputes, participating in various multilateral forums and institutions, pushing for regional integration, and improving bilateral relations all aimed to create a stable environment in China's neighbourhood and build an image of a rising but benign power. Gradually, Beijing realised that employing cooperative instruments was most effective to compete with other major actors in achieving its strategic goals and protecting its security interests.

Many signs indicate that China intends to continue to carry out this strategy in the foreseeable future. Such a strategy might continue to contribute to regional stability and peace as it has in the past two decades. By downplaying the security disputes and promoting various cooperative measures, it helps create an overall positive political atmosphere to better manage those disputes. It also makes it possible for various parties to engage in

communications and talks with regard to those disputes. However, it should be emphatically noted that China's cooperation for competition strategy is far from an attempt to seek final solutions to those security problems. It has largely been premised on Beijing's acknowledgement of the status quo of those security issues. There are still many uncertainties with regard to the possible scenarios of those disputes, particularly when China's military becomes much stronger in twenty years. This is exactly why many regional states still harbour strategic suspicions of China.

The growth of China's strategic influence in East Asia, largely as a result of its cooperation for competition strategy, has become a serious concern for Washington and Tokyo. In fact, observers in the strategic circles in the US are now alarmed by the increase of China's influence in the region. They worry that China is making all the strategic gains at the expense of the US. Indeed, China's approach of using the "charming offensive" to compete at the strategic level is a very difficult challenge to the US. Washington would have a much easier time to cope with East Asian international affairs if China had adopted either an aloof stance towards many of its neighbours or an assertive and heavy-handed strategic approach.

How should the US respond to China's cooperation for competition strategy? Policy makers in Washington need to understand four things. First, China's relentless efforts in managing its international relations in East Asia in the past two decades have entailed a regional situation in which containment or constrainment of China has become an unfeasible option. Second, with the increase of Chinese power and interactions with neighbouring countries, Beijing will naturally become more important to other states in East Asia. Willingly or unwillingly, Washington will have to recognise the fact. Third, China's increased strategic influence in East Asia has not been translated into any dramatic rise of its security profile. For the foreseeable future, many regional states will still look upon the US, not China, for security protection. Fourth, China's cooperation for competition strategy has also created or expanded areas of international interactions, for instance, non-traditional security in the region. Officially Beijing does not seek to exclude the US in any of the policy areas in the region for fear that doing so would aggravate the strategic suspicions in Washington and many capitals in East

Asian, while at the strategic level China would be happy to see the gradual decline of US strategic weight in the region. This essentially means that a good strategy for the US is to step up its involvement in various policy areas in East Asia and to stage a similar "charming offensive" strategy.

Dr. Li Mingjiang is an Assistant Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.