Abstract: When China first joined APEC, it was assumed that the Pacific Century would be managed by APEC with all participants experiencing the East Asian economic miracle, peace & prosperity. Since that time, China has presented challenges to Asia-Pacific regionalism through ASEAN plus three and more recently through the "one belt, one road" or Belt Road Initiative (BRI) that would create a Sino-centric order (Tianxia).

Whether Tianxia is the cultural foundation for BRI or not is debatable. Chinese official statements never refer directly to Tianxia. Nevertheless, there is an evolving Chinese discourse that would socially construct a regional order based on Tianxia, relying on concepts that indirectly imply an emerging Sino-centric order. This discourse has entered Asia-Pacific regional organizations in Chinese diplomatic language and practices which has the possibility of transforming regional organizations in a more Sino-centric direction. This paper will analyze these ongoing challenges to the regional order, Chinese efforts to restructure the order, and Asian countries' responses to "one belt, one road."

Introduction

The Obama administration (2009-2017) will be remembered in China for its rebalance to Asia policy. The US rebalance (美国再平衡战略) was a comprehensive strategy to concentrate US attention and resources on Asia. Chinese had difficulty conceptually reconciling the US rebalance with the pervasive Chinese belief in the power transition, a Chinese narrative of China's rise and US decline leading to a power transition that would give Beijing preeminence over its neighborhood East Asia. The power transition is deeply embedded in Chinese consciousness although it has yet to fully emerge and has not progressed as Chinese had hoped.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, Chinese assumed the US was in permanent decline and no longer able to block China’s Rise. Obama’s message that America welcomed rather than feared China’s continued rise was accompanied by criticism of specific Chinese behavior that violated a rules-based order: Trade practices, Human Rights violations, and cybersecurity.

The Obama administration’s strategy was to expand a US diplomatic, economic and military presence in Asia, strengthen US military alliances, find a workable approach to dealing with China, participate in and further institutionalize Asia-Pacific multilateral institutions, and devote more attention to Southeast Asia. Obama and his Asia team were initially expecting a cooperative relationship with China, and were not focused on Realpolitik’s balance of power strategies. The US wanted to shape China’s rise so that it would be a stable, constructive force. Obama relied on both engagement and containment as previous administrations had done but with less negative rhetoric. Obama’s use of smart power, both hard and soft power, was misconstrued by Beijing as weakness.

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Realists in the Obama administration felt the US should never be accommodating to Beijing because Chinese only respect power and only respond to that. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian & Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell noted “Chinese respect strength, determination and strategy.”\(^2\) Campbell, the architect of the pivot, later called rebalance, wrote in his memoir that due to Chinese provocations in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the US response was a pivot strategy that protected freedom of navigation with US military deployments, closer coordination with military allies, greater participation in Asian regional institutions, and active public diplomacy.\(^3\) Campbell stressed that it was not a containment strategy of China. It was a strategy to influence Asia-Pacific’s norms and rules, to create a rules-based order which China’s rise appeared to undermine.

The philosophical origins of the rebalance go back to the 19th century. US grand strategy from then until the present in the Asia-Pacific has been balance of power with the goal of preventing any single hegemon from dominating East Asia. Historians divide this into two phases. The first phase was 1784-1907. US policy in Asia was driven by interest groups, merchants and missionaries, promoting the Open Door policy meant to prevent European hegemons from closing off markets to US merchant and missionary interests. The second phase was 1907-1973. During this phase, the US went to war with an Asian hegemon, Japan, that tried to dominate East Asia within a yen block. This was followed by a Cold War with the Soviet Union which threatened to control East Asia within a Communist Bloc, thus closing off US commercial access to markets. The US strategy was an anti-communist symmetrical containment. The Nixon Doctrine represented a shift in strategy, requiring US allies to take primary responsibility for their own defense. The US shifted to asymmetrical containment, and balance of power politics within the US-USSR-PRC strategic triangle.\(^4\)

In 2017, the East Asian region is in a Post-Cold War order, where it has been for 25 years. East Asian scholars speak of a need for a new regional architecture to create an Asia-Pacific order or an East Asian order, but nothing has emerged.

The US rebalance strategy was not a G-2 strategy, nor was it an anti-China containment strategy. East Asia would not have supported a G-2 strategy, nor would it have supported containment of China, the largest trading partner with most of the smaller Asian countries. The US rebalance strategy was a hedging strategy, compatible with East Asian countries’ own hedging strategies as they promoted economic relations with China and relied on the US for security assurances. The US has framed the question of East Asian order as based on principles, as a choice between a rules-based order, which it contrasts with an order based on hegemonic power. This is attractive to smaller countries and middle powers who support a rules-based order.


China has framed the question of East Asian order as based on geography with China at its center in the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (one belt, one road, or OBOR). Chinese scholars and policymakers have begun to refer to East Asia as “the neighborhood” and “the periphery,” discursively erasing East Asia’s regional identity.

Although advocates of the China’s Rise and Power Shift discourse would all self-identify as Realists analyzing a shift in the balance of power, this paper will argue that the power shift discourse is the social construction of a regional order, necessary to construct a domestic order the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The US rebalance to Asia would be met with Chinese strategies for redefining the situation. The Chinese had debated for years the ‘power of discourse’ (huayuquan -话语权), the power to define international relations and global order with Chinese concepts. Beijing would redefine the US rebalance strategy to accommodate Chinese views of the power shift with a China rising and a declining US.

An important vehicle for constructing regional order is the narrative of “China Rising--US Declining--the Power Shift will give Beijing preeminence over East Asia.” American scholars and analysts have discussed and debated the Power Shift thesis for two decades.

American and Chinese scholars have jointly contemplated the Power Shift and its consequences, discussing whether it will lead to conflict or accommodation, and considering the multiple dimensions of the shift.

In 2006, David Shambaugh published his edited book *Power Shift: China and Asia’s New Dynamics* with contributions by famous American, Chinese, Japanese and Korean scholars. Two years later, Robert Ross and Zhu Feng edited *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, with contributions from American, Chinese, Japanese and Korean authors. By 2014, Shambaugh, rethinking previous assumptions, argued that China is only a partial power with a constrained global governance capacity, its diplomatic behavior more symbolic than substantive.

Samuel Kim has written on the past three East Asian systems for regional order: China’s Sino-centric order, Japan’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and the US’s hub-and-spokes pattern in the bipolar order. Kim warned that none of these past patterns were suitable for present day East Asia in creating order and none were acceptable to all countries.

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Since then, East Asian discursive practices continue to revive and review many of the same arguments in a region-wide discourse on what a potential regional order will look like. G. John Ikenberry argued that the East Asian order was built on American ideas and intellectual traditions regarding regional order—Realist ideas of military power and containment; Liberal ideas of regional order, multilateralism and soft power.\(^{10}\)

In US-China relations, the focus is “China’s Rise, America’s decline, and the power shift from the US to China.” American scholars who support deep intellectual engagement with Chinese counterparts tend towards optimism, but they recognize that American and Chinese differing preferences for world order derive from differing national traditions, ideas, and historical legacies. Both China and the US believe their values are universal values. These values and ideas shape the way national interests are defined and power is used.\(^{11}\)

Many American scholars have participated in the Power Shift narrative because they enjoy dialogue with their Chinese counterparts. But few Americans would adopt the Power Shift concept as an ideology, ignoring empirical evidence to the contrary. Nor would they support a new bipolar order in East Asia with China on one side and the US on the other side.

For two decades the Power Shift has been discussed but has not yet completely materialized. Scholarly debate on the implications of the Power Shift included the possibility that the US was withdrawing from Asia, or that the region would hedge against China, or contain China, or maintain a stable balance between China and the US, or that there might be a clash between a rising hegemon and a declining hegemon. Others argued that China could be socialized within existing international organizations. Still others thought China would use its influence to subvert from within the US-led world order. The debate has been about the consequences of the Power Shift rather than whether there was a shift.\(^{12}\)

Other scholars in the West debate whether there is in fact a Power Shift. Critics question the lack of specificity in empirically identifying a Power Shift. In China, everyone discusses China’s Rise, American decline and the subsequent Power Shift in East Asia. The author had originally thought that no one could be allowed to question whether there was a Power Shift. However, Chinese scholars, in feedback provided to the author, claim that no one in China wants to question the Power Shift. It is deeply embedded in Chinese consciousness. It is a pervasive discourse which finds few doubters.

Before 2016 in China, the Power Shift was based on a mix of rising GDP and rising military power. Currently, China’s GDP growth has slowed, and GDP data is not completely reliable. China’s exports in February 2016 were 25% less than the previous February.

East Asian multilateral regimes, and the potential for a Northeast Asian regime, have been undermined by East Asia’s preoccupation with: China’s Rise, America’s

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decline, the Power Shift from the US to China, the emergence of a potential Sino-centric order by means of “one belt, one road,” and the potential of a balancing coalition, balancing against China’s Rise.

This preoccupation has distracted a lot of brain power that could have been better spent working on creating more viable Asian multilateral regimes and a more secure Asia-Pacific architecture.

**US Discourse on East Asian Order**

In the realm of practice in East Asian relations, the discourse is shifting toward conflict. The US Defense Department is not willing to buy into the Power Shift narrative. In the security dimension of world order, US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter has claimed that Russia and China represented challenges to the international order, especially several pillars of that order, “peaceful resolution of disputes, freedom from coercion, respect for state sovereignty and freedom of navigation.” He conceded that China was rising, but he noted that “neither Russia nor China can overturn that order.”

In February 2016, in a US Congressional hearing, U.S. Pacific Commander Admiral Harry Harris stated “I believe China seeks hegemony in East Asia. Simple as that.” The *Global Times* accused Harris of bashing China, and that his harsh comments could lead to conflict.

Recent Australian commentary has been very critical, suggesting China is a “predator state” which implies China’s Rise is not peaceful. The analysis’ recommended regional responses of “vigilance, deterrence and containment…formation of counterbalancing coalitions… a willingness to act across a whole range of spheres – military, economic, financial, trade and diplomatic.”

American sceptics of the Power Shift suggest that the shift is slowing as China’s GDP drops and an economic recession emerges. They suggest the possession of power and how it is exercised is not clear.

Other American sceptics believe China, as the rising hegemon, is promoting a delegitimation of the US-led world order and attempting to construct an alternative world order. Chinese resistance to the American hegemon has both a discourse and a practice. However, they argue that China simultaneously pursues roles as a spoiler, a supporter and a shirker of the current world order.

Another US debate is a military debate between deep engagement in East Asia or offshore military balancing in response to China’s Rise. Up to the present, deep engagement is still the US strategy. Robert Sutter argues that the image of US decline was socially constructed by journalistic accounts and lacks empirical

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specificity. Michael Beckley refers to this as “declinism,” a misperception which could lead to either US reckless behavior or retrenchment. Beckley argues that China is rising but it is not catching up.

A RAND study views OBOR in Central Asia as an "Empty Fortress Strategy," feigning confidence and strength with military and economic initiatives in Central Asia, a region where China is weak and vulnerable, uncertain of the other powers' intentions. The Empty Fortress Strategy is implemented within the SCO. The study claims "China’s increased power and influence in Central Asia is as much about skillfully managed perception as it is about reality." Chinese also note that OBOR relations have had unanticipated complications.

Joseph Nye argues that traditional power transition ideas applied to US-China relations are misleading. China’s domestic problems are enormous, undermining Beijing’s claims to being a rising hegemon. He suggests that US sources of strength are not only military. The US use of smart power, both hard and soft power, will maintain US influence in East Asia.

American scholars worry about the challenge the Power Shift presents to the US-led global order. Walter Russell Mead perceives a coalition of illiberal powers -- China, Iran, and Russia attempting to create their own spheres of influence, in a contemporary version of the Great Game in Central Asia, which would challenge the US-led global liberal order. John Ikenberry countered that the global order is not that fragile, and that "Russia and, especially, China are deeply integrated into the world economy and its governing institutions." China and Russia can at most be part-time spoilers of the global order, and are deeply distrustful of each other. Westphalian principles are the foundation of the global order to which Russia and China have "tied their national interests." The Mead-Ikenberry debate situated the issue within a Realist vs. Neo-liberal Institutionalist/Constructivist framework.

Ikenberry has noted that one pathway that might lead away from this liberal order was the trend of constructing rival spheres based on geographical blocs, such as the Sino-centric order, that would fragment the system and breakdown its institutions. In contrast, Chas Freeman Jr doubts that a Sino-centric order is a viable project or that China could establish a Pax Sinica.

American scholars have warned that overestimating the Power Shift by third countries in East Asia could lead to failed foreign policies as these third countries attempt to accommodate to China’s Rise. The Japanese political party, the

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Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), and its attempted Asia Pivot while in office are considered an example of overstating the Shift. America’s discursive power is credited with blocking the DPJ’s Asia Pivot.\textsuperscript{27}

Overestimation of the Power Shift ignores what Avery Goldstein argues is the real danger in US-China relations: the asymmetry of power, i.e., Chinese weakness. China as the militarily weaker side, in a crisis, will have pressures to use force preemptively, to act first. Asymmetry contributes to the temptation to use force.\textsuperscript{28}

American scholars are divided on whether there is a significant Power Shift in East Asia, and question its empirical underpinnings. Two decades of waiting for the Power Shift, which appears increasingly discursively constructed, has left many skeptical.

**Chinese Discourse on Regional Order**

American skepticism towards the Power Shift thesis does not mean the thesis does not have real world policy consequences. This section will argue that Chinese expectations of a Power Shift, with East Asian regional resistance to the thesis, has the potential for repeated crises and conflicts.

The Chinese counter-strategy to the US rebalance became the Chinese concept of the “new model of major country relations”（新型大国关系）which Xi Jinping, Vice President at that time, introduced to President Obama in February 2012. This concept had embedded within it the goal of equal relations between China and the US. It was a Chinese effort to neutralize the US rebalance and to speed up the power transition by imposing a Chinese concept on Asia-Pacific international relations. The two pillars of the concept were US-China equality, which would enhance perceptions of China’s rise, and avoidance of confrontation, which would prevent a balancing coalition from emerging and containing China’s rise. The US never fully adopted the concept although Chinese would continue to refer to it as an exercise in discourse power.

The year 2015 was the year of OBOR—books published and conferences held—which generated a Power Shift fever throughout China. Every university, research center, state-owned enterprise, and provincial government contributed to the discourse on OBOR. This rich outpouring of ideas helped to socially construct the perception of China’s Silk Road-based regional order.

Chinese scholars have not questioned the Power Shift thesis and have engaged American scholars in a dialogue about when and how, but not if, the Power Shift will occur. The author had previously assumed that it was forbidden to question the Power Shift thesis. However, through dialogue with Chinese scholars, she was told that no one in China wants to question the Power Shift.

Yan Xuetong is a vocal advocate of China’s Rise, the Power Shift, an emerging Sino-centric order, and OBOR. Yan’s commentary on the Diaoyu/Senkaku crisis is indicative of how theory influences practice, how Power Shift thinking impacts Chinese foreign policy. Yan had thought the Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis would help China emerge as East Asia’s leader if it demonstrated Japan’s decline and China’s rise. In 2013, Yan Xuetong blamed Japan’s failure to recognize China’s Rise as the cause of


the crisis. Yan attributed the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute to Japan’s failure to recognize that China had risen, and that there was a “National Rejuvenation” project in China that was returning East Asia to a traditional world order [Sino-centric order] which should lead Japan to give China more respect.29

The author has heard Chinese Foreign Ministry officials state a modified version of this thought, conveyed in code, that “Japan must recognize China’s development.” A Global Times editorial more explicitly stated, “Japan must recognize Beijing’s will,” with regard to the Senkaku/Diaoyu, and if Japanese did not, they would be “given a humiliation that will stay with them for years.”30 The coded message is: Japan must recognize China’s rise within a Sino-centric order, realize that Japan is China’s periphery, and be more obedient.

Some Japanese scholars also viewed the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute as an unsuccessful attempt by Beijing to establish a Sino-centric order.31 Other Japanese analysts thought Beijing was using the Diaoyu dispute to pressure the US-Japan alliance and thus to undermine the East Asian order based on the US-led alliance system.

In October 2012, Wang Jisi, professor at Peking University, proposed that China march west to Central Asia and the Middle East rather than confront the US rebalance in East Asia.32 It was during the time of the 2012 Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis. This idea of marching west would emerge as the Silk Road Economic Belt in September 2013 when Xi Jinping introduced it to Kazakhstan.

In early 2012, Yan Xuetong had claimed Russia was a reliable ally because China and Russia shared common strategic interests. He thought the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute was a common strategic issue for both of them. Yan expected Russian cooperation with China on these kinds of issues in a Sino-Russian alliance because this would benefit Russia by giving it a larger presence in East Asia.33 Sometime during December 2012 to January 2013, Beijing appears to have approached Moscow, asking for Russia’s diplomatic and public support in the Diaoyu crisis. The Chinese were disappointed that Putin was not more supportive.34 The Diaoyu/Senkaku crisis revealed that Moscow and Beijing had very different understandings of what the East Asian order should look like.

In October 2012, China’s Ambassador to Russia, Li Hui, listed all the reasons Moscow and Beijing should be aligned on the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute which implied that they were not aligned. He referred to the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, the September 2010 Sino-Russian joint statement on the Asia-Pacific, and the close

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30 “Japan must recognize Beijing’s will,” Global Times editorial, March 14, 2013, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/767993.shtml#.UUHWj9HF2p0.
31 Yoshihide Soeya, “How can Japan navigate the Senkaku dispute and China’s rise?” East Asia Forum, March 10, 2013.
34 For further discussion on this topic, see Christoffersen, “The Sino-Russian Partnership: Central Asian Norm Diffusion into the Asia-Pacific,” International Studies Association 2013, San Francisco.
contacts the two countries maintained over regional issues. Russian media noted that the Ambassador was expressing Chinese concern over “Moscow's position on the Chinese-Japanese territorial dispute over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands,” Russian reluctance to be drawn into the Diaoyu/Senkaku.35

Elizabeth Wishnick argues that the anti-US rhetoric that is often heard in Chinese and Russian statements, is prevented from evolving into extensive anti-US activities due to the divergence in interests between China and Russia.36

This particular crisis, that used low-intensity conflict, failed to change the East Asian order towards acceptance of the Power Shift thesis and the Sino-centric order. The Power Shift thesis could lead to additional future crises as Beijing tests East Asian countries’ acceptance of the China’s Rise thesis.

Yan Xuetong’s discourse reveals an expectation of East Asian bandwagoning with China rather than balancing against it, including Russia. It reveals Chinese perceptions that Russia is the weaker of the two countries since it is usually the weaker country that bandwagons with the stronger country. In 2016, Chinese scholars were still expressing surprise and disappoint in Russia’s failure to bandwagon with China during the Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis of 2012.

Yan has indicated that the future direction for “one belt, one road” (OBOR) is to take the weakest members, the least capable of independent action, and turn them into military allies. Potential candidates include Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, some Central Asian states, and Pakistan. Yan argues that this is the means that Beijing needs to maintain a balance of power in East Asia.37

Professor Yan argues for a shift that is based on moral authority rather than based on power. He seeks to determine how “a rising state is able to displace a dominating hegemon even though it is inferior to the latter in terms of economic base, technical invention, education system, military strength, and political system.” Yan argues that China will lead a shift based on values, that “it will be possible for China to change the international system in the 21 century if it practices the moral principles of fairness, justice, and civility both at home and abroad.”38

There are a few Chinese sceptics. Beijing University Professor Zha Daojiong has warned that “Talk of the US being on the decline is back in vogue” – leading to Chinese thinking China will benefit. He warned that “Chinese policymakers and analysts should not believe their own jingoistic rhetoric about a US in decline” and further “it would be a serious error, not to mention profoundly risky, for China to promote domestic and foreign policy choices based on that shallow premise.”39

Chinese skeptics of the Power Shift argue that the nature of Chinese economic power was “contingent and socially constructed,” which problematized the theory of

35 “China insists on implementing statement that condemns falsification of WWII results,” Interfax, October 26, 2012.
39 Zha Daojiong, “China must see past its own hype of an America in decline,” South China Morning Post, June 18, 2014.
the Power Shift. The argument was that China’s economic growth derives from being embedded in global production networks and cannot be characterized as solely Chinese national economic power.\textsuperscript{40} The Chinese economy was not a strong basis for a Power Shift.

Feiling Wang has noted that Beijing wants the benefits of both the Westphalian system (state sovereignty) and the Sino-centric Tianxia, Pax Sinica. This leads to a profound disjointedness in Chinese foreign policy, ranging from integrating into the Westphalian system or displacing it with a Chinese world order.\textsuperscript{41}

An embedded assumption in OBOR is that all countries within OBOR will bandwagon with Beijing and become more obedient because China is rising. This assumption ignores a possible emerging balancing coalition in East Asia against China’s Rise. In 2014, a Chinese scholar noted that countries within the OBOR sphere have not been as cooperative nor accepting of OBOR as Beijing had expected.\textsuperscript{42} In 2017, that still held true.

Southeast Asian countries are hedging between China and the US. Malaysia is a good example of both participating in the Maritime Silk Road and strengthening military relations with the US. It is the first ASEAN country to allow port construction under the Maritime Silk Road project. Other ASEAN members fear ports would be dual-use, having both civilian and military uses.

The Power Shift thesis also forms the basis for China in the South China Sea. Singapore in the past had always followed balance of power strategies between major powers but now that China had risen, Beijing expected Singapore to bandwagon with China. When the OBOR initiative was announced in 2013, Beijing stated its expectations that overseas Chinese would be useful conduits for OBOR in their host countries.

The Chinese were surprised in July 2016 when Singapore stated its support for a rules-based order in East Asia, related to the South China Sea tribunal ruling. Singapore was attacked by the Global Times, accusing Singapore of supporting the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, and claiming that Singapore had betrayed its Chineseness. A professor at the PLA National Defense University, claimed Beijing should make Singapore "pay the price for seriously damaging China’s interest" with retaliation and sanctions. There have been economic consequences in declining trade.

It was a new Chinese approach of coercive diplomacy towards Singapore to force it into leaning more towards China and demonstrate that there was in fact a power shift occurring in East Asia. Beijing felt that since China had risen, Singapore and other ASEAN countries had less room to maneuver between the US and China. The Singapore-China conflict overshadowed the Xiangshan Forum in October 2016.

\textsuperscript{41} Feiling Wang, “From Tianxia to Westphalia: The Evolving Chinese Conception of Sovereignty and World Order,” in America, China, and the Struggle for World Order.
Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Defence Ong Ye Kung told the Forum that Singapore could only survive in a rules-based order based on international laws such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.43

A Singaporean assessment, by Tang Siew Mun, of the ongoing tension claimed that “the Chinese guns trained on Singapore were in fact targeting ASEAN” to send “a strong and unequivocal signal to other ASEAN member states to fall in line or face Beijing's ire. China's intent may be to teach Singapore a lesson, but it has in fact caused grievous harm to ASEAN.”44 He was responding to an article by Feng Zhang which had stated "Beijing wants Singapore - and perhaps other regional countries as well - to understand that the rise of China has reduced these countries' maneuvering space between China and the US" and that it was “…now time to come to terms with the reality of Chinese power and accommodate its interests or otherwise face consequences.”45

Beijing had hoped Xiangshan would create a new Asia-Pacific security architecture, one that would support Chinese leadership of the region, and would displace the Shangri-la Dialogue that Singapore has organized for many years. China is usually criticized in the Shangri-la dialogue for undermining a rules-based order. The notion of rules-based order is widely supported in the Asia-Pacific, a form of security for small states in a Westphalian system, and is considered a rebuke of the Sinocentric order. With China-Singapore tensions continuing to simmer in 2017, Beijing sent a lower ranking delegation to the Shangri-la Dialogue and also announced that it would not hold a Xiangshan Forum that year.

Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was not invited to China’s Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in May 2017. Singapore is not especially in need of financing and has its own capacity for infrastructure construction. Former Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs Bilahari Kausikan warned Singaporeans to stay calm and resist "psy ops" or psychological operations of foreign powers, by which he meant China. Singapore would continue to maintain stable relations with China.

Conclusion

The Chinese had taken the US rebalance strategy, which was meant to counter China’s rise and the power shift, and turned it into a means for enhancing perceptions of a power shift by stressing China’s equality with the US in the concept of the “new model of major power relations.” This strategy depended on China’s power of discourse, continually persisting in concepts that the US and other countries did not use. American critics argued it was a conceptual trap—the “new type of great-power relations” concept promoted the power shift thesis, a false

43 “Singapore needs to be strong advocate of rules-based world order, says Ong Ye Kung,” Straits Times, October 11, 2016.
44 “ASEAN needs some serious soul-searching on its ties with a friend showing signs of increasing assertiveness,” Tang Siew Mun, The Straits Times op-ed, October 8, 2016. Dr Tang Siew Mun is head of the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute.
narrative of China’s rise and US decline, granting China great-power status without conditionality on its foreign policy behavior.\textsuperscript{46}

Under the new Trump administration, Obama is no longer US president but his rebalance to Asia strategy has not disappeared. Analysts argue that Obama’s Asia policy is pretty much where he left it except for the abandonment of TPP.\textsuperscript{47} When Trump’s Secretary of State Tillerson visited Beijing, he appeared to accept the concept of “the new model of major power relations” thus strengthening Chinese discourse power.\textsuperscript{48} However, from Tillerson’s point of view, it was just meaningless jargon, not a policy statement. Many Chinese analysts had hoped for a US retrenchment under Trump, possibly withdrawal from East Asia, which would have been visible proof of the power shift. But there are no signs of that happening.

If no one in China is inclined to publicly question the narrative of “China Rising, US Declining, the Power Shift will give Beijing preeminence over East Asia,” then there is no reality check. Some Chinese analysts quietly and anonymously question the narrative but almost no one seeks to publicly criticize. This has deprived Beijing policy makers of a feedback mechanism.

This paper has suggested that the Power Shift thesis was the conceptual basis for Chinese foreign policy behavior in the Diaoyu/Senkaku crisis. Chinese seemed surprised that neither Japan nor the US recognized China’s Rise as the logic for claiming the islands. Chinese were very surprised that Russia did not bandwagon with China. Chinese were also surprised that Singapore has not given up its independent balance of power foreign policy.

The problem with adhering steadfastly to the Power Shift narrative is the conceptual blinders that lead Chinese analysts and policymakers to ignore empirical evidence that does not conform to the idea of a Power Shift leading to a new East Asian order. This social construction of reality through discursive practices has real world consequences as foreign policy actors buy into the discourse and act accordingly.

East Asia has been discursively reconstructed as “China’s Neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{49} This overlooks Southeast Asian countries hedging relations with China by improving relations with the US, Japan, India, and Russia. This hedging undermines Southeast Asian countries complete incorporation into the Maritime Silk Road project. East Asia’s hedging is also in the form of increasingly close security relations with the US, Japan, Russia and India.

There are alternative voices in China that are not swept up in the OBOR fever. An alternative to a Sinocentric order, an Asian multilateral regional order, is found in the work of another Chinese scholar, Zhang Tuosheng, who takes a more integrative approach to the East Asian order, perceiving an emerging security order featuring pluralism, cooperation and coexistence in East Asia which includes the ASEAN-led multilateral regimes, the US-led alliance system, major power coordination, the China-Japan-ROK FTA, RCEP, and a series of trilateral security dialogues--China-

\textsuperscript{46} Andrew S. Erickson and Adam P. Liff, “Not-So-Empty Talk: The Danger of China’s ‘New Type of Great-Power Relations’ Slogan,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Snapshot, October 9, 2014.


\textsuperscript{49} The author once attended a lecture on China and East Asia by a Chinese scholar who only referred to East Asia as China’s periphery, never once referring to the East Asian region by name.

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