



**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF CHINA'S STRATEGY IN SHAPING REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURES**

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**ANNOTATION**

China's approach to the formation of regional and global security systems represents a complex combination of soft power instruments, economic interdependence, and strategic diplomacy aimed at ensuring a secure environment for national development while contributing to global stability. Rooted in Confucian philosophical traditions, China's security thinking prioritizes harmony, stability, and the minimization of conflict. Economically, China capitalizes on its position as a leading trading partner for numerous states, using economic connectivity as a tool for fostering cooperation and influence, most notably through large-scale initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. At the diplomatic level, China promotes a vision of multilateral global governance and advocates reforming international institutions to better reflect the pluralistic and interconnected nature of the contemporary international system. This approach often contrasts with Western security paradigms, which traditionally emphasize military alliances and interventionist practices. Regionally, China seeks to maintain stable relations with neighboring states through mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and active engagement in ASEAN-led forums. Nevertheless, China's growing influence is accompanied by persistent challenges, including territorial disputes, regional tensions, and concerns related to the expansion of its military capabilities.

**Introduction.** The pursuit of an orderly and stable international system has long remained a central concern in both the theory and practice of international relations. In the contemporary era, traditional security paradigms face unprecedented challenges arising from deepening global interdependence, rapid technological transformation, and shifting power configurations. Under these conditions, understanding the evolving security strategies of major powers has become essential for navigating the complexities of the twenty-first-century international environment.

As a rapidly rising power with an ancient civilization and a distinctive political system, China occupies an increasingly influential position within the global security architecture. Its expanding economic and military capabilities, coupled with active participation in international affairs, have generated extensive scholarly debate regarding the nature and implications of its security approach. Whereas traditional Western security models have largely relied on military alliances, deterrence, and unilateral actions, China's security perspective places greater emphasis on multilateralism, cooperation, and the concept of a shared future for humankind.

This article examines the distinctive characteristics of China's approach to the construction of regional and global security systems. It explores the core principles underpinning Chinese security thinking—**mutual respect, non-interference, common security, and peaceful development**—and analyzes how these principles are reflected in China's engagement with regional and global institutions. Particular attention is given to China's participation in mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ASEAN-related forums, as well as its role within broader multilateral platforms, including the United Nations and the G20. Additionally, the article evaluates the security implications of major Chinese initiatives, notably the Belt and Road Initiative and the concept of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind, which seek to promote interdependence, shared development, and long-term stability.

**Literature review.** China's approach to the formation of regional and global security architectures has become one of the most actively debated topics in contemporary international relations scholarship. Existing studies primarily focus on the historical foundations of China's security thinking, its institutional mechanisms, and its growing influence on global governance and international security systems. D. Kang (2010) analyzes the traditional East Asian "tributary system," arguing that China's historical security worldview was grounded in

hierarchical order, legitimacy, and stability rather than military domination. This historical legacy, according to Kang, continues to indirectly shape China's modern security strategy. Similarly, J.T. Dreyer (1996) and A. Kusztal (2017) explore the theoretical foundations of regional security systems, emphasizing collective interests, shared threats, and institutionalized cooperation as core components of sustainable security architectures. The evolution of China's contemporary security concept is examined in detail by E.F. Larus (2005), who introduces the notion of China's "New Security Concept" and the "Peaceful Rise" strategy. Larus highlights China's preference for mutual trust, economic interdependence, and multilateral diplomacy over traditional power-balancing and military alliances commonly associated with Western security paradigms. China's role within regional institutions is extensively discussed by Z. Huasheng (2013) and A.S. Whiting (1997), who emphasize the strategic importance of organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and ASEAN-led forums. These institutions are portrayed as platforms through which China promotes confidence-building measures and non-traditional security cooperation. In contrast, Ashraf (2017) offers a critical perspective by examining China's geostrategic ambitions, particularly through the "String of Pearls" strategy, focusing on maritime security and power projection. At the global level, China's emerging security initiatives have been analyzed by Kun Xu, Zhiping Lv, and Jiayi Li (2024), who assess the Global Security Initiative (GSI) in relation to international law and global governance norms. J. Nye (2020) situates China's rise within the framework of the "Thucydides Trap," arguing that strategic competition between major powers increasingly shapes the global security environment.

Overall, the existing literature provides diverse theoretical and empirical insights into China's security strategy. However, many studies examine individual dimensions in isolation. This article contributes to the debate by offering a comprehensive analysis that integrates China's historical experience, institutional engagement, and contemporary security initiatives into a unified analytical framework, thereby clarifying China's distinctive role in shaping regional and global security architectures.

**Methodology.** This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine China's strategy in shaping regional and global security architectures. A combination of complementary methodological approaches is employed to ensure analytical depth and conceptual

clarity. First, the historical-analytical method is used to trace the evolution of China's security thinking from the traditional tributary system to the Cold War period and the post-Cold War era. This approach allows for a contextualized understanding of how historical experiences continue to influence contemporary Chinese security policies. Second, a comparative analysis is conducted to contrast China's security approach with dominant Western security models, including military alliances, deterrence strategies, and interventionist policies. This comparison highlights the distinctive features of China's model, particularly its emphasis on multilateralism, economic diplomacy, and the principle of non-interference. Third, the institutional analysis method is applied to examine China's engagement with regional and global organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ASEAN Regional Forum, the United Nations, and the G20. This method facilitates an assessment of how China utilizes multilateral institutions as instruments for security cooperation and norm diffusion.

In addition, the study employs content analysis of official Chinese policy documents, leadership speeches, and strategic concepts, including the New Security Concept, Peaceful Rise, Global Security Initiative, and the notion of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind." These primary sources are analyzed alongside key academic publications to ensure a balanced and evidence-based interpretation. The combination of these methodological approaches enables a systematic and objective assessment of China's role in the construction of regional and global security architectures, providing a robust foundation for the study's analytical conclusions.

**Results.** Regional security systems can be understood as institutional frameworks established by geographically proximate states to address shared security concerns and enhance regional stability<sup>1</sup>. Such systems typically emerge from common interests, perceived threats, or the desire for collective security arrangements. Historical ties, cultural affinities, economic interdependence, and geopolitical considerations often serve as key drivers behind their formation. A defining feature of regional security systems is the emphasis placed on cooperation and coordination among member states, manifested through joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, coordinated responses to security challenges, and diplomatic mechanisms for conflict resolution. This might operate through joint military exercises, shared intelligence, coordinated responses to security threats, and an overriding process of diplomacy in conflict resolution<sup>2</sup>. For instance, one of the leading regional security systems is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which covers the NATO region of North America and Europe. The NATO members are committed to collective defense, which means that an attack against one of its members is an attack against all. The concept of collective defense helps deter potential aggressors.

Other regional security system functions include providing a platform to fight non-military threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and cyber threats<sup>3</sup>. In that respect, the capacity of the member states to counter such challenges is enhanced through sharing of resources and expertise. Regional security systems usually also play an important role in peacekeeping and management of conflicts by offering mechanisms for mediation and dialogue, thereby preventing or managing disputes. However, regional security systems are not free of problems. Different national interests, political ideologies, and strategic priorities may cause frictions between the member states, which would eventually cause the effectiveness of the system to erode<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, there is the likely impact of an external power over regional security dynamics, which may further complicate any efforts aimed at securing autonomous and coherent system maintenance.

The global security system is the harmonized effort of the international community in addressing security-related challenges that

supersede or cut across national and regional boundaries<sup>5</sup>. Contrary to regional security systems, the global security system creates a robust framework that attempts to integrate manifold dimensions of security threats related to traditional military conflicts, transnational terrorism, cyber warfare, climate change, pandemics, and economic instability. The global security system is essentially anchored by international organizations and treaties providing for inter-state cooperation and coordination. The United Nations is the chief pillar underpinning the global security system. Its Security Council performs a key role in maintaining international peace and security. Furthermore, the UN plays a major role in facilitating diplomatic negotiations and imposing sanctions, mandating peacekeeping missions, and holding a framework within which states take up any security concerns to address through dialogue and consensus<sup>6</sup>.

Another key element of the international security system is international law, which is reasoned by norms and rules that regulate state behavior<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, agreements like the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Paris Agreement on Global Climate Change are ways through which an attempt is made to deal with certain questions about security at the global level. The main purpose of the treaties was to avert the risk of conflict by establishing cooperation and compliance with such issues and promoting sustainable development. The contribution of the different levels in the security of various non-state actors, such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations, helps to support global security. These are institutions that complement the effort to handle the security challenge by making provisions for humanitarian needs, advancing human rights, and pursuing economic development<sup>8</sup>. It can't be denied that a set of challenges is felt within the global security system. The complexity and diversity of the threats to security demand holistic and coordinated responses that are hard to realize, for the simple reason that states have different interests and capabilities<sup>9</sup>. Power imbalances, geopolitical rivalries, and an inability to enforce these many various actions further complicate the ability to ensure global security. Added to this is the eruption of non-state actors in the forms of terrorist organizations and cybercriminals that pose very new challenges, which the state-centered approach to security is not well positioned to handle.

**Discussions.** China's historical security outlook can be traced to the tributary system that governed its foreign relations for centuries. This system established a hierarchical regional order in East Asia based on the concept of imperial centrality and reciprocal obligations between China and surrounding states. While effective in maintaining regional stability for an extended period, the tributary system proved inflexible in the face of rising powers and external intervention, ultimately collapsing under the pressures of Western imperialism and internal decline during the nineteenth century.

During the Cold War, China confronted a unique security dilemma characterized by simultaneous threats from both the United States and the Soviet Union. Ideological divergence and territorial disputes led to the Sino-Soviet split, compelling China to adopt a strategy of strategic ambiguity and non-alignment. This approach allowed Beijing to preserve strategic autonomy, navigate great-power rivalry, and pursue national interests. Mao Zedong's "Three Worlds Theory" further articulated China's positioning as a leader of the developing world, challenging superpower dominance and fostering solidarity among newly independent states. This type of system established a hierarchical order within East Asia, based on the concept of "Heaven's Mandate" and the emperor as the "Son of Heaven." The tributary states acknowledged the preeminence of China and subordinated themselves to its authority by paying tribute and, in turn, receiving imperial recognition, protection, and trade privileges<sup>10</sup>. The tributary system basically dealt with regional security and paid more attention to the

<sup>1</sup> Kuształ A., (2017). "Theoretical foundations of regional security in international relations the overview." *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższa Szkoła Oficerska Wojsk Lądowych im. Gen. Tadeusza Kościuszki* Journal of Science of the gen. Tadeusz Kościuszko Military Academy of Land Forces, 49(1), pp:17-30

<sup>2</sup> Amandine Gnanguénan, Stephanie C. Hofmann. (2024). "Regional security cooperation." *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, pp:164-181.

<sup>3</sup> Wiesław Lizak, Kamil Zajączkowski, Małwina Ewa Kolodziejczak. (2021). "Non-military aspects of security in the changing international order" *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 33(1), pp:7-13.

<sup>4</sup> Dreyer, J. T. (1996). *Regional Security Issues*. *Journal of International Affairs*, 49(2), 391–411.

<sup>5</sup> Radoslav Ivančík, Vojtech Jurčák, Pavel Nečas. (2014). "On some contemporary global security risks and challenges." *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 4(3); pp:34-49.

<sup>6</sup> Malla, K.B. (2007). "UN Security Council Reform And Global Security." *Asian Yearbook of International Law*, Volume 12, Brill, pp:31-56

<sup>7</sup> Kun Xu, Zhiping Lv, Jiayi Li. (2024). "Global Security Initiative and the Development of Contemporary International Law." *5th International Conference on Education, Sport and Psychological Studies*, Vol.8, pp:64-71

<sup>8</sup> Blair, A., & Curtis, S. (2009). "Non-State Actors." *International Politics: An Introductory Guide*, Edinburgh University Press; pp:173-206

<sup>9</sup> Raghavan, V. R. "Challenges to Global Security." *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 3 (2007): 23–39.

<sup>10</sup> Kang, D. C. (2010). *Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia*. *Security Studies*, 19(4), pp:591-622

local area in the vicinity of China. It encompasses the entire region of East Asia, including such vassal states as Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and many others. Contacts with those states beyond this region existed but were low in number and not that well systematized. It made sure that there was stability within the Chinese sphere of influence, and it came out as the dominant regional power. While it had been extremely successful in keeping regional stability for centuries, the tributary system nonetheless retained some very serious limitations. It was, after all, a hierarchical and rather rigid system, open to constant challenge from would-be rising powers. The gradual decline of the Qing Dynasty during the 19th century and increased interference from Western powers cut down the very fragility of this security order. Thus, it was unable to eventually survive due to the inability of the system to adjust itself into the changing global scenario.

What made the security dilemma of China in the Cold War different and peculiar was that it created a “two-front” threat with both the United States and the Soviet Union. While the Soviet Union presented a territorial threat with its expansionist ambitions in Central Asia and the ongoing border conflict with China, the US represented an ideological and military opponent of gigantic might with its global reach and growing presence in East Asia.

The initial orientation that China had taken up with the Soviet Union, moulded in the years immediately following World War II, began to dissolve due to ideological differences and territorial disputes. This ideological chasm widened in the 1960s as China began rejecting Soviet interpretations of Marxism-Leninism and challenging its leadership among the communist bloc. This ideological split opened the avenue for a series of border clashes in 1969 that would further strain relations. In such a two-front threat environment, strategic ambiguity would be the overall strategy that China would embrace. The approach would introduce deliberate obscurity over its alliances and intentions to deter both superpowers from intervening in Chinese affairs. The strategy served China pretty well, as it could retain some amount of flexibility while safeguarding independence and pursuit of national interest.

China was an avid promoter of nonalignment during the Cold War years, seeking closer ties and forging alliances with other developing nations to try to challenge the power balances in place then. Its membership in the Non-Aligned Movement in 1964, among other newly developing countries of that time, like India and Egypt, raised the role of China in international affairs. The strategy enabled Beijing to exploit the rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union over influence in the Third World and attracted political and economic benefits. Mao Zedong's “Three Worlds” theory in 1974 solidified China's strategic outlook in the era of the Cold War<sup>11</sup>. It divided the world into three groups:

- The First World: This group encompassed developed capitalist countries, led by the United States<sup>12</sup>.
- The Second World: This group encompassed socialist countries, led by the Soviet Union<sup>13</sup>.
- The Third World: This group encompassed developing countries, representing the majority of the world's population<sup>14</sup>.

China attempted to assume the role of superpower of the Third World, building solidarity with fellow developing nations and opposing the prevailing global power relations. In that respect, this theory has it that China aspires to play a leading role in the shaping of the post-Cold War world order and be at the forefront in supporting the aspirations of developing nations. The theory of “Three Worlds” enabled China to build alliances with other developing nations in the world while challenging the superpowers. It provided China with the possibility of postulating itself as a champion for the oppressed and an alternative to the existing strategy. Chinese diplomacy was therefore very effectively positioned by setting it as one of the major players in the global political field and building relationships with a wide array of countries around the world.

China began to build a network of alliances with the Third World in its interests and international support. This approach helped to counterbalance the influence of the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, weakening their hegemony and giving shape to a

multipolar world. The theory of the “Three Worlds” proved to be quite an effective way to gain China's legitimacy in the international arena and mobilize support for its interests. Though aligned with the Soviet Union, China had started looking toward a strategic opening with the West since the early 1970s. With the completion of the Sino-Soviet split, and also afraid of Soviet expansionism, China slowly moved closer to the US. It was actually a surprise that in 1972, President Richard Nixon visited China, which turned out to be a milestone in the bilateral relationship of the US with China and set it onto a new course of cooperation. It is in this context that this strategic adjustment could enable China to play off US-Soviet rivalry and maximize the security of balance of power<sup>15</sup>.

The end of the Cold War paved the way for a new age of international relations characterized by the rise of a multipolar world. With the Soviet threat to China's borders coming to an end, China could begin to shift its attention and resources toward economic development and international status. It was in this new context that there began a basic shift in Chinese security thinking, most clearly articulated in the promulgation of a “New Security Concept” in 2004<sup>16</sup>. The “New Security Concept” was a dramatic departure into multilateralism, with a much greater dedication to a considerably more cooperative international order. It focuses on common responsibility for security, mutual trust, and dialogue. This concept therefore echoes deeper in the light of China's own realization that, concerning the question of security in the 21st century, it is no longer about mere national power but collective action and cooperation.

China's “New Security Concept” has laid much emphasis on the need for an umbrella security framework, founded on mutual trust and shared responsibility. This idea goes against traditional notions of security that rest on military might and interests of nations. Rather, it reflects a more comprehensive approach to economic, social, and environmental dimensions of security. Together with the “New Security Concept,” China also launched a “peaceful rise” strategy that aims to set the world's mind at ease over its purely peaceful nature and strive cooperatively for international order. The goal of the strategy was to dispel anxieties in the world over the rise in power of China and to build trust with other countries. Even though the “peaceful rise” has been interpreted in many ways, it clearly shows the commitment of China to engaging with the world and playing a responsible role in the shaping of the international system.

Even with initiatives like the “New Security Concept” and the strategy of “peaceful rise,” strategic ambiguity remains at the very core of China's security thinking in this 21st century. It has generated soaring concern over its intentions as Chinese military power rises, growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, and the continuous pursuit of an accelerated “String of Pearls”<sup>17</sup>. China's strategy for a “String of Pearls”, a network of military bases and strategic partnerships across the Indian Ocean - heightens concern of growing power projection capable of challenging the prevailing regional and global security order. This strategy, aimed at keeping access to vital sea lanes safe and energy interests secure, has increased tension with the nations in the region, especially India.

The tightrope walk between economic development and national security remains a challenge for China's security thinking. Its economic growth aspiration, linked to the ambition of becoming a world power, resulted in increasing military spending and the development of state-of-the-art military equipment and capabilities. This created a perception of possible militarism and growing risks of confrontation. The so-called “Thucydides Trap”, the notion that war between a rising and currently dominant power is inevitable – has become central in international relations<sup>18</sup>. This tension, caused by economic rivalry and strategic competition, puts a huge challenge to global stability.

Unlike the traditional models of security as developed in the West, the Chinese framework places primary concern on cooperation, mutual interests, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Quite the opposite of hegemonic ambition that is sometimes associated with the West, to China, security implies collective action and common destiny. Indeed, this is realized through its active

<sup>11</sup> Kang, L. (2015). Maoism: Revolutionary Globalism for the Third World Revisited. Comparative Literature Studies, 52(1), pp.12-28

<sup>12</sup> What Is a First World Country? <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/first-world.asp>

<sup>13</sup> Second World Definition <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/second-world.asp>

<sup>14</sup> Tomlinson, B. R. (2003). What Was the Third World? Journal of Contemporary History, 38(2), pp.307-321

<sup>15</sup> Hummel, A. W. (1989). China's Changing Relations with the U. S. And U. S. S. R. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 133(1), pp.75-83

<sup>16</sup> Larus, E. F. (2005). China's New Security Concept and Peaceful Rise: Trustful Cooperation or Deceptive Diplomacy? American Journal of Chinese Studies, 12(2), pp.219-241

<sup>17</sup> Ashraf, J. (2017). String of Pearls and China's Emerging Strategic Culture. Strategic Studies, 37(4), pp.166-181.

<sup>18</sup> Nye, J. S. (2020). Perspectives for a China Strategy. PRISM, 8(4), pp.120-131.

involvement in regional organizations such as the SCO and ASEAN Regional Forum, and in its own initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The BRI is a strategic framework that aims to build connectivity and foster common prosperity across infrastructure projects in Eurasia and African counties. Indeed, this policy proposes that economic development and connectivity may offer new ways of improving security, as things like poverty, inequality, and instability are among the major causes of conflict<sup>19</sup>. What this approach stresses are shared benefits and peaceful dispute resolution, which is implemented through open dialogue and negotiation sharply different from the militaristic approach of traditional security alliances.

The SCO, a regional security and economic organization, provides a platform for China to collaborate with its neighbors on a range of issues, including counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and border security. The SCO's commitment to mutual respect, non-interference, and collective security echoes China's own values, fostering an environment of trust and cooperation within the region<sup>20</sup>. The organization's focus on promoting economic development, particularly through its emphasis on energy and resource sharing, further reinforces the connection between economic cooperation and regional security.

The fact that China is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, established as the foremost forum on dialogue and cooperation in Southeast Asia, speaks loudly for its commitment to regional stability and the guarantee of non-interference in the affairs of other nations<sup>21</sup>. Confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution describe this forum and converge with China's peaceful coexistence and diplomatic solution approach. More importantly, the very fact that China has accepted the "ASEAN Way" of consensus-

building and non-confrontation within its framework underlines the regime's willingness to work regionally by building bridges and establishing trust.

The idea of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind stresses China's aspirations toward a world that is more just, equitable, and secure<sup>22</sup>. At its very root, this vision shows shared responsibility toward problems of global dimensions – climate change, terrorism, poverty and enjoins a turn away from zero-sum competition to win-win cooperation. This was a vision that would strike a chord in China's cultural consciousness, steeped as it is in Confucian precepts of harmony and respect.

**Conclusion.** China's approach to security departs significantly from traditional Western models centered on military alliances, deterrence, and unilateral action. Instead, it prioritizes economic diplomacy, multilateral engagement, non-interference, and cultural values, offering a distinctive framework for regional and global security governance. As China's influence continues to expand, its security strategy represents a critical factor shaping the evolution of the international system in an increasingly multipolar world.

The effectiveness of China's approach will depend on its ability to address internal and external challenges, build trust with other actors, and align its policies with its stated commitment to cooperation and peaceful development. Understanding the complexities and implications of China's security vision is therefore essential for assessing future global security dynamics. Continued dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective action grounded in shared interests will be crucial in navigating the evolving security landscape of the twenty-first century.

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