Chapter 8

China’s Rise, the Transformation of East Asian Regional Structure, and Development Direction of the East Asian Order

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Abstract

The rise of China has in essence changed the political landscape of East Asia and led to the formation of a dualistic regional structure based on mutually separate economic and security centers. Such a structure is the result of the interactions of several factors, such as China's economic rise, America's “engagement and containment” policy towards China, as well as East Asian states hedging their bets between the U.S. and China. At the same time, the existence of such a dual structure has further increased the possibility that regional states are hedging their bets between China and the U.S. East Asia’s dual structure has produced unfavorable influences on East Asian cooperation and has caused regional powers and important actors to more frequently employ regional institutions as their strategic instruments, a practice that has reduced regional institutional arrangements to a tactic used by some to serve their power contestations. Generally speaking, the dual structure in East Asia will continue to persist into the future. But fundamentally speaking, the stability and efficiency of the East Asian order need joint cooperation from China and the U.S. to explore ways in constructive coexistence.

Keywords

East Asian structure – East Asian order – China's rise – two-pronged policy – strategic hedging

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East Asia has managed to maintain a peaceful state for a long period of time since the end of the Cold War. With the rise of China, fundamental changes though have taken place in the economic landscape of East Asia, but the established regional security structure has remained basically the same. As a result, some special features have emerged during the evolution of the East Asian structure, such as the “superficial friendship” relationship between China and the U.S., frustrated regionalism, institutional redundancy, institutional competitions, and widespread strategic hedging by many East Asian nations towards China. The emergence of the above-mentioned phenomena in East Asia has had internal links to the paths chosen by China in the process of its rise against the special East Asian backdrop, as well as the special regional structure formed in the process of China’s rise. The special structure so far formed in East Asia will produce profound influences on the evolving path of the East Asian order.

I China’s Rise and the Transformation of the East Asian Structure

Since the end of the Cold War, East Asia has generally maintained a peaceful environment. The most notable changes emerging from this background are a continuous rise in China’s economic strength and the remarkable deepening of regional economic cooperation. The transformation of the East Asian structure is a result of the rise of China and the changing economic landscape. The emergence of the above-mentioned phenomena in East Asia has had internal links to the paths chosen by China in the process of its rise against the special East Asian backdrop, as well as the special regional structure formed in the process of China’s rise. The special structure so far formed in East Asia will produce profound influences on the evolving path of the East Asian order.

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