CHAPTER 1

Return of China’s Regional Concept and Construction of a New Order

Zhang Yunling*

Abstract

In its history, China established a stable order and relational structure with its neighbors. This traditional geopolitical and economic order, however, collapsed in modern times. The founding of new China in 1949 opened a new stage for diplomacy with surrounding countries, and its leaders have tried to gradually rebuild normal relations with them. For a long time, however, the Chinese could not articulate a comprehensive precept for its regional foreign policy. Now with China’s rise and improved relations, its government is introducing concepts and strategies to build a new structure of relations and order in the region. China defines these principles as the doctrine of the “community of common destiny.” This doctrine has become an important platform for China to build relationships with its neighbors and to create a new international order.

Keywords

surrounding areas – surrounding relations and order – regional concept – community of common destiny

China borders a number of countries, and combined, they form a vast region that encompasses both land and sea. China has maintained a special geographical relationship with its neighbors, centered on surrounding areas and a special order of regional coexistence.

* Zhang Yunling is an academy member, director of international studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, distinguished visiting professor of Shandong University, and chairman of the Chinese Association of Asia-Pacific Studies. His email address is zhangyl58@163.com. The Chinese version of this article was first published in Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi 世界经济与政治 [World Economics and Politics] 2 (2015): 5–25.
Domestic conflicts and foreign invasions led to the fall of China in modern times. With this fall, the traditional balance of power between China and its neighbors also collapsed. In 1949, the founding of the new China ended civil conflicts and served as the springboard for national reunification and rejuvenation. However, the Cold War and other complicated factors have made it difficult for China to reclaim its traditional position within the region.

Following changes in domestic and external factors, China gradually has adopted traditional tenets of regional diplomacy and made efforts to lead the process of re-establishing more normal relationships with countries in surrounding areas. This article looks at China's traditional concept regarding regional relations, analyzes its efforts to readopt traditional strategies of diplomacy and cooperation with its neighbors, examines characteristics of new regional relations, and covers the processes involved in establishing a geopolitical and economic order that in some ways resembles what had been in place before the fall of the Chinese dynasty in the 19th century. It then introduces China's strategies for building a community of common destiny with its neighbors.

1 Surrounding Relations and Order in the History

Throughout its history, China developed its own tenets, rules, and ways of dealing with its neighbors. More economically advanced than its neighbors, the Chinese people gradually developed relations with neighboring populations and played a leading role in that process. China established complicated relationships of various types with neighboring countries and regions. The Chinese system included some of these countries. They accepted China as their suzerain and rendered tributes to it. Although most of its neighbors did not belong to this system, they tried to maintain friendly and stable relations with China.1

As the most powerful country in the world, China had its own unique perspectives on regional and global affairs. Its leaders formed unique “China-foreign country” hierarchical and cooperative relationships. To maintain its

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