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The Blind Men, the Elephant, and Regional Order in Northeast Asia: Towards a New Conceptualization

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Abstract

No theory seems to describe accurately and explain competently the new, unusual, and idiosyncratic Northeast Asian regional order phenomenon. It is because Northeast Asian specialists like the blind men have seen only one of the parts of the 'Elephant' or a part of what is taking place in Northeast Asia. This paper attempts to employ a new, more appropriate, more productive analytical tool to understand and navigate efficiently the Northeast Asian regional order. The main objective of this paper is 'the rise of China and Northeast Asian regional order', what it is and what is taking place in the empirical world when we say that something we call 'the rise of China and Northeast Asian regional order' is taking place.

Donald Puchala in his paper 'Of Blind Men, Elephants and International Integration', bringing an Indian fable, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant', into use for the first time in the international relations literature, correctly pointed out that European integration specialists, who had examined one of the parts, phenomena and features of the Elephant (European integration) or a part of what is taking place in Europe, were like the blind men because they have an inclination to discuss what takes place 'out there' 'in terms of what it *should be* and what it *should be leading toward* rather than in terms of what it is and is leading toward' (Puchala, 1971: 268). Puchala's application of the blind men and the elephant to European integration is relevant to today's Northeast Asian case. The events that led to 'the new shape of Northeast Asian regional order' as a result of China's

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growing power and influence also resemble the episodes of European integration, and it is these events that scholars have tried to capture theoretically and conceptually.[1]

More specifically speaking, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant' tells us that human beings, including academics, have a tendency to see and believe what they *want* to see and believe. Seven blind men set out to discover the 'Something' (an elephant). Each blind man visited the 'Something' on a different day of the week and imagined what it looked like. They touched a different part of the 'Something'. The blind men felt a cliff, a spear, a pillar, a snake, and a rope respectively, as they described a different part of the object. None of them could agree on what the object was or give an exact description of the elephant. Similar to the seven blind men, and the European integration scholars, Northeast Asian specialists who have attempted to describe for more than 20 years 'the reshaping of the Northeast Asian regional order', as a result of the rise of China, cannot reach a conclusion on precisely what it looks like. One of the main reasons for the failure of a precise description and explanation is because they, like the blind men, have only seen one of parts, phenomena and features of the 'Something' or a part of what is taking place in Northeast Asia.

The realists, including, for instance, Aaron Friedberg (1993/94) and John Mearsheimer (2003), characterize Northeast Asian regional order as inherently anarchic and potentially hostile, while anticipating an inevitable clash between the existing dominant powers (the US and Japan) and the rising power (China), owing to the asymmetric structural properties of the regional system, incompatible antagonistic nationalism, and territorial disputes surrounding Dokdo/Takeshima and Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. According to them, exclusive national identities, mutual mistrust, and lack of a constructive idea of regional order building are leading to an unstable and insecure regional order. In contrast to the realists, who see regional order in Northeast Asia as being conflict prone, the liberalists, such as John Ikenberry (2011), David Shambaugh (2005), and Amitav Acharya, (2003/04) contend that regional conflict and confrontation in Northeast Asia are not predestined. Rather, Northeast Asian regional order, as the regional spillover effects of its economic integration occur, is a regional community into which China is assimilating and in which the growing acceptance of general standards takes place so as to resolve peacefully regional conflicts. They maintain that once norms are institutionalized, they will be able to become binding on member states, including China. Meanwhile, the revisionists, including David Kang (2003) and Martin Jaques (2012), argue that a hierarchical structure dominated by China, rather than Northeast Asia's regional community, would necessarily and automatically result in a peaceful regional order and be accepted as legitimate by other regional actors. However, Peter Katzenstein (2012) opposes Jaques and Kang's approach in that history does not repeat itself. He contends that China's rise is neither a rupture

[1] In this paper, Northeast Asia is referred to as a sub-region of East Asia, consisting of China, Japan, North and South Korea, and Russia.

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with, nor a return to, history. Instead, in China's rise a recombination of old and new patterns and components is recognized.

All of them agree that the rise of China raises crucial questions about the nature of regional order in Northeast Asia. Discrete scholars, however, have deified, and based their views on a different theory. They – who argued 'it is a hegemonic system', 'it is an insecurity complex system', 'it is a nation-state system', 'it is a regional community', 'it is an old-fashioned *tianxia* system' – have insisted that what they described and explained was the 'Something' or the most significant one, while viewing the others as marginal and inconsequential. It turns out that no theory seems to describe accurately and explain competently the new, unusual, and idiosyncratic Northeast Asian regional order phenomenon. It is because their intellectual efforts to describe and explain Northeast Asian regional order have been influenced by normative preferences, and all the models present images of what Northeast Asian regional order could be or should be rather than what it is here and now, as Puchala (1971: 267–9) maintained in the European case. Since there is no sufficient conceptual model to describe the evolving Northeast Asian regional order, we need to employ new, more appropriate, more productive analytical tools to understand and navigate efficiently the Northeast Asian regional order. This paper contends that this new model must reflect and raise questions about what the Northeast Asian regional order is at present.

Meanwhile, this paper focuses on China and its pivotal backyard, Japan and South Korea. It is because since the 1990s, China, Japan, and South Korea, with the exception of North Korea and Russia, have begun to engage economically, culturally, and politically with one another, and with great vigor, searching to establish a Northeast Asian regional order. The repercussions of China's rise are observed most conspicuously in its relationship with Japan – enjoying much greater autonomy from China – and South Korea – being once the classic tributary state. However, so far, intellectual attention on regional order building has long been preoccupied with the hegemonic role of the US and its continuation in Northeast Asia, the Sino-US relationship in the face of China's rise, and Southeast Asia with its relatively prominent institutional arrangements in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Thus, current literature has failed to be attentive to the dynamics of transformation and the new horizons of regional order from the local perspective. This paper aims to examine, in its regional context, 'Northeast Asian regional order and the rise of China', what it is, and what is taking place in the empirical world when we say that 'the Something' we call 'the rise of China and Northeast Asian regional order' is taking place.

Regional order building and identification

The term of 'region' is certainly key to the study of regional order. It is commonly held that a region consists of 'a set of states linked by geography ... one or more common traits, such as level of development, culture, or political institutions' (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2002: 37–8) and has a level of mutual interdependence. Regional order is viewed as the pattern and arrangement of relationships or interactions within a

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region. Of course, there are various forms of regional order that are distinct to regions and periods of time. Regional order ranges from the very traditional arrangement, in which order is sought via balance of power, to various cooperative efforts at security management – a great-power concert, hegemonic system, *tianxia* system, collective security, pluralistic security community, or regional community. As constructivist theories demonstrate, regional order is a socially created entity, a so-called political and social project. Since a region can be socially constructed, it can also be deconstructed from within and from outside by the same authorities that built it up (Lake and Morgan, 1997: 11–12). Mostly when we speak of regional order, we mean regional order that has been made. There is no 'natural' or 'given' regional order, but it is constructed and re-constructed by human actors.

What matters in this paper is why the members of a region choose a special regional order, and what factors influence the members to construct a particular regional order. As Robert Cooper (2000) argues, the making of regional order is not always the outcome of power, interests, values, and politics, but could also be of identification. This paper upholds the assumptions that identification is decisive to the making of regional order and the interplay between region and identification will define the characteristics of regional order. This paper's attention on identification does not negate that at any given moment in time, power, interests, values, and politics crucially circumscribe the making of regional order. What this paper contends is that power, interests, values, and politics are not established in advance of the uses and abuses of identification in a precise way, but rather identification and power, interests, values, and politics are dependent on each other. A focus on identification helps to better understand the historically and ideologically conditioned construction of power, interests, values, and politics.

For instance, China's self-identification and its neighbors' identification with China are, more than anything else, key to understanding the power, interests, values, and politics in the formation of regional order. We cannot appreciate China and its neighbors' power, interests, values, and politics without first understanding China's identification of itself and others' identification of China. The identifications that have developed within and among states, and are interconnected with power, interests, values, and politics, provide the important elements for creating regional order. Whatever regional order emerges, it is one that is at least defined by the identifications of the states within the region. Visions of regional order – nation-state system, regional community, hegemonic system, Pax Sinica, etc. – resonate with their identifications. The reshaping of Northeast Asian regional order as a result of the rise of China constitutes no exception.

As Table 1 shows, the formation of Northeast Asian regional order involves two major dimensions of how China identifies itself and at the same time how Japan and South Korea identify China: (1) Chinese self-identification: non-Sinocentrism (nation-state or Asian) or Sinocentrism (*zhonghua* or hegemon) and (2) Others' identification of China: 'We'-ness (*laoshi* – a highly venerated senior teacher – or partner) or Otherness (adversary or revisionist). A combination of the two dimensions helps us to get a better understanding of the characteristics of regional order building in Northeast Asia.

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Table 1. *A two-way identification of the formation of Northeast Asian regional order*

	Categories of identification	Quintessences of identification
Chinese self-identification	Non-Sinocentric identity (status quo)	Nation-state Asian
	Sinocentric identity (revisionist)	*Zhonghua* Hegemon
Others' identification to China	Weness (accommodation)	*Laoshi* Partner
	Otherness (resistance)	Adversary Revisionist

How China sees itself

If we want to comprehend how China is likely to behave towards the region, then first we need to make sense of what has created China, what it is now, and how China sees itself. And although China's impact on regional order formation will depend on power, interests, values, and politics, one key variable of importance is how China sees its regional position and role. China's identity tells us a great deal about the underlying logic, power, interests, values, and politics of China regarding the formation of regional order. In other words, visions of regional order resonate with 'China's collective identity, such as non-Sinocentrism (nation-state or Asian) or Sinocentrism (*zhonghua* or hegemon).

Non-Sinocentrism

China identifies itself as one among sovereign states or part of many states in the Northeast Asian regional order. Today's non-Sinocentrism, however, did not arise until the end of the nineteenth century when the West and Japan finally denied Sinocentrism. When China was weak and in no position to demand adherence to its 'superiority', China was forced to admit non-Sinocentrism, accepting China itself as one among states or a constituent of many states in Northeast Asia. China's 'de-centering' process led to the recognition and identification of being one among them rather than being at the center of the entire known world as *zhonghua*. Being aware of the fact that China was marginalized by the West, China has been compelled to reshape its identity from a lone axis of the *tianxia* system into both a nation-state and a part of many states in Northeast Asia.

Not zhonghua but one among them. Consciousness of one among nation-states, so-called nationalism, has roots in China's intellectual worldview, dating to the Self-Strengthening Movement of the late Qing dynasty. As Sinocentrism was shaken and undermined, national consciousness rapidly acquired widespread popularity and usage. For instance, by 1894 several scholars, such as Cheng Kuan-ying, Ma Chien-chung, Tseng Chi-tse, and Chang Chih-tung, pronounced that China was a nation-state among equal states rather than *zhonghua*. It was like the state of China in the multi-state structure

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throughout the years of the Spring and Autumn Annals and Warring States (Twitchett and Fairbank, 1978: 189–90). China's national consciousness has two distinctive natures. First, the consciousness of modern China as just one of nation-states is a reaction to the West's colonialism and in particular Japan's invasion. The memory of humiliation and victim mentality shapes and underpins modern Chinese consciousness, which is based on the belief that China is just one of them. Second, survival as a nation-state among them has been the overwhelming concern for China, after enduring the painful wounds inflicted by the Western powers and Japan during the century after the Opium Wars. Therefore, today, as one among nation-states in the world, China's overwhelming priority is the preservation of national sovereignty and not to repeat the profound experience of humiliation and grievance engendered by foreign, including Japanese, occupation. China's current national consciousness as one of them is showing its hypersensitivity to foreign insults, issues pertaining to sovereignty, and, in particular, the territorial issue against Japan as in the demonstrations in 2005 and 2012 (Jacques, 2012: 262–3, 307–8).

No longer zhonghua but part of Asia. At the turn of the nineteenth century, China opened up to a component of Asia, so-called Asianism, as well as to national consciousness. China struggled to recognize Asia as a value-laden category, while at the same time being aware that China's status within the region was not *zhonghua* but that China was part of a larger region. Some Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao, Sun Yat-sen, Zhang Taiyan, and Li Dazhao, recognized the significance of regional cooperation and of developing compassionate identification with other Asian peoples under the framework of Asian unity in order to resist the impending Western peril. China's recognition of itself as a component of Asia, however, vanished when faced with Japan's soaring imperialist ambitions in the 1930s. Asianism initiated by Japan turned out to be attempts to topple the Sinocentric regional order and integrate China into the area of Asia of which Japan became the center (Jo, 2014: 140–52). Following the rhetoric of East (*doyo*) – Japanese imperialist version of *tianxia* – Japan ended the intrusion of China and inhumanities in the Rape of Nanking and climaxed with the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japanese imperialist ambitions for the region gave rise to China's misgivings regarding Japan's articulations of Asianism. They ignited the flame of nationalism in China rather than reinforcing the idea of the creation of a regional identity. Furthermore, its bitter confrontation with the United States during the Korean War meant it was unable to interact with its neighbors for years. The Cold War isolated China from Northeast Asia according to the realpolitik logic of balance of power. It was not until China's market reform and later the end of the Cold War that China's awareness of itself as a component of Asia, as a proactive actor, reemerged (Shih, 2012: 76–83).

Sinocentrism

Sinocentrism is based on a deep-rooted sense of being superior to the non-Chinese and belonging to *zhonghua* that boasts several thousands of years of uninterrupted

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history. China was never engaged in sustained contact with other countries on the basis of equality, in part due to its millennium-long history, unfathomable richness of cultural tradition, as well as its immense population. Sinocentrism was a legitimating narrative for an empire to proceed with its civilizing projects in the periphery. Despite the alleged jettisoning of traditional values, Chinese Sinocentrism has remained unchanged and is reemerging.

Zhonghua as the heart of civilization. The *zhonghua* mentality based on a sense of 'Chinese greatness (*daguo*)', a belief in 'Northeast Asia is within China' or 'China sits at the heart of the whole world' is derived overwhelmingly from Chinese suzerainty, which means the universal applicability of ways of thinking, familial norms, social relationships, the role of government, and the structure of interstate relations with China's peripheries. The term *zhonghua* suggests a benign relationship with others, and an inert and passive presence regarding the maintenance and preservation of stability and harmony in the universe as a sacred responsibility and duty of the empire. It makes China appear like the US – the US believes that 'what the US does must be right for the world because it represents the future of humankind' (Buzan, 2010: 21–2). The *zhonghua* mentality is constantly intervening in and acting as a guide to, and yardstick for, regional order in the present. For instance, today the Chinese elites are delivering the *zhonghua* mentality, stating that handling of its own growth will be good for everyone because China itself is so large a part of mankind. And China is responsible for providing a 'harmonious' world or environment for its neighbors who should defer to China's political and cultural sensitivity while expecting favorable economic terms (Rozman, 2012: 151). Therefore, the *zhonghua* mentality, by taking a benign self-view, they believe, helps to exclude balancing great powers or any hedging against China's rise, leading its neighbors to alter their preferences to conform with China through socialization or Sinification.

Challenger to the status quo. China as a hegemon is a player projecting a direct or indirect imperial dominance in which China at the top has more power, authority, and esteem than its neighbors at the bottom that China rules by the implied means of power. The hegemon perception is based on stereotypical hard-power realist thought about China's right to expand aggressively its power over other countries and to be in control of the Northeast Asian region. China does not hesitate to retaliate against those countries that have wronged China in the past. China, which has been forced to face an identity crisis – a feeling of being torn between their own culture and that of the West, and an inferiority complex about its own relative backwardness – has endured a 'century of shame and humiliation' and various indignities at the hands of the West and Japan. Aspirations for restored pride and dignity, wealth and power have been deeply embedded in China's psyche. China's rise has imbued the Chinese with self-assurance, replacing the image of a backward and vulnerable China. Their self-confidence, which interacts with China's remaining sense of inferiority, is expressed in the configuration of the hegemon perception (Shambaugh, 2013: 17; Jacques, 2012: 107–8, 307–8; Takahara,

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2008: 219). From this perspective, China no longer pretends to be a marginal power in Northeast Asia, it is expressing assertively its own right as one of the engines of the regional and world economies, and as a hegemon that might soon reach superpower standing. China is not reluctant to impose its norms and rules on its neighbors, and there is an inevitable shift in the balance of power and a challenge to the *status quo*.

How Japan and South Korea Identify China

The formation of regional order is accomplished not only by China, but also by its neighbors working together to create the necessary conditions for regional order. In other words, neighboring countries, such as Japan and South Korea, are crucial to the formation of regional order. As President Hu Jintao properly pointed out in an speech, in 2004: 'China's opportunities – and challenges – lie in [its relations with] peripheral countries; the latter provides China with a hope, but can also be a cause of instability' (Li, 2009: 31). Thus, along with China's identification as either Sinocentric or non-Sinocentric, how Japan and South Korea identify with China also holds the key to the formation of regional order because their identifications towards China – the sense of 'we'-ness (*laoshi* or partner) or 'otherness' (adversary or revisionist) – help inevitably to shape the ways in which China builds regional order because Japan and South Korea must decide whether or not they will affirm the Chinese-led regional order.

'We'-ness

A sense of 'we'-ness is used to refer to oneself together with other people regarded to be in the same category. It is also described as 'bundles' of shared identities, values, experiences, histories, norms, and roles that are used to draw a boundary between the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. The formation of regional order is influenced by a sense of 'we'-ness. In the case where China and its neighbors share 'we'-ness as members of the same in-group, China is not seen as a threat. Because Japan and South Korea understand the situation China faces and have a strong attachment and bond towards China, Japan and South Korea are more likely to accommodate the Chinese-led regional order (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007: 749–50). A sense of 'we'-ness has emerged from historical/cultural experiences and memories. It is historically induced inclinations and proclivities handed down over generations that make Japan and South Korea either identify China as *laoshi* mainly on cultural and perceptual grounds or define China as a partner.

China as laoshi. Geography and distance have led Japan to be the most resistant state to the traditional Chinese-led Northeast Asian regional order. Japan, like China, thought of itself as far more than an undistinguished state, and relished in exceptional freedom from China, refusing Sinification, in contrast to the Korean case (Jacques, 2012: 345–6). However, although Japan had formed its own peculiar status and accompanied Japanization of the Chinese concepts, Japan showed respect to China as *laoshi.* It was

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because Japan had profited culturally and intellectually from its interactions with the continent of China. However, for Japan, the dominant national interest was to 'escape Asia and enter Europe', and Japan tended to look down on China which was often considered as backward. Meanwhile, despite its loss in 1945, Japan started to regard itself as superior again because it had sprung up from the ashes of defeat to become the second economy in the world. However, it is only in recent years that the rise of China has led to the questioning of the perceptions of Japanese superiority and of Chinese backwardness (Yahuda, 2006: 163–4).

Although Korea was never likely to suffer from the colonization of China, Korea's destiny was contingent on its mighty neighbor, China. In order to maintain its autonomy and sovereignty, in contrast to Japan, which was semi-sinified, Korea had paid homage to *laoshi* China since Koguryu's defeat against the Tang, while having almost voluntarily sinified themselves through fervently imitating or internalizing much of China's ruling ideology and statecraft. In particular, in the late sixteenth century, the Ming Imperial Court sent large troops to help Chosun against the rapacious Japanese. The nearly saved Chosun was very thankful to the Ming, which was officially designated as *laoshi* or benefactor that mercifully recreated Chosun. Consequently, the degree of Chosun's 'cronyism (*shidazhuyi*)' towards the Ming notably grew. China was seen as Korea's benign *laoshi* with righteous rule. Then Chosun also unavoidably paid tribute to the Qing, who alleged its heritage of the Ming mandate after Chosun's futile objection to the northern barbarian (Chung, 2007: 13–14). However, in the late nineteenth century, after the Opium Wars, the Qing Dynasty was unmistakably declining. Encountering an impending war against Meiji Japan over the suzerainty of Chosun, the Qing lost the war and its face of the *laoshi* as well. The end of suzerainty and Japan's consequent colonization separated the formal relations between Korea and China. To Korea, the perception of China as a *laoshi* existed no longer.

China as partner. Most Japanese could not envisage their worldview without it being propped up by the West. But there have been those who advocated the improvement of partnership and the development of all-embracing cultural and intellectual ties with China. In the early Meiji period, some Japanese pan-Asianists such as Miyazaki Tōten and Okakura Tenshin ventured to build a partnership with China in opposition to the imperialist Eurocentric international order. Their movements were based on the belief that the Japanese shared common physical traits, so-called 'same race and same culture (*dobun doshu*)', with China. However, just a few decades later Japanese pan-Asianism served as a tool for legitimizing Japanese colonial rule to China (Jo, 2011: 12–18). Japan was regarded as a foe rather than a partner by China. After the war's end, a restrained Japan had been unwilling to develop its partnership with China. In addition, the relationship between Japan and China was structurally blocked by the polarization of the cold war. Japan concentrated on developing intense political–economic bonds with the US. However, Japanese policy towards China during the 1970s and 1980s transformed into being positive regarding an established partnership

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because of both the Sino-American détente and Chinese interest in the procurement of Japanese resources. Japan had provided China with a great deal of aid as an investment for Japan's own interests and regional stability. Since the 1980s, Japan's partnership with China has been considerable, boosted by economic interdependence. However, their interdependence does not act as a stimulus for a constant partnership or as a constraint against allowing relations to worsen.

In contrast with the partnership between Japan and China, the one between Korea and China has stayed relatively stable. Although Korea's loss of independence meant the end of the formal links between Korea and China, anti-Japanese Korean nationalists and the Kuomintang, or the Communists in China, formed a strong partnership in order to counteract Japanese imperialism. At the time Korea was liberated from Japan, the cold war was evolving in Northeast Asia. The Korean War subsequently ruptured the partnership between South Korea and China. However, South Korea never relinquished its underlying feelings of partnership towards China. Hence, as soon as diplomatic relationships were normalized in August 1992, Seoul and Beijing expedited their mutual partnership, holding formal and informal summits more than once or twice a year so as to discuss various issues. South Korea has developed a beneficial partnership with China, beyond the level of the relationship between North Korea and China (Suh, 2012: 10–12).

Otherness

In the international relations literature, otherness is defined as a status in which a community or nation excludes a particular community or nation who does not fit in with its community. Generally speaking, human beings, groups, communities, and nations are divided due to a sense of otherness or of being different. It becomes a cause of negative perceptions, such as distrust and fears about the other. For instance, once affirmation of the 'self' as Japanese or South Korean is achieved through denial of China as the other, it is destined for China to be perceived as a distrustful adversary or fearful revisionist. The differences in the system, ideology, and values between Japan/South Korea and China led Japan and South Korea to perceive China as an adversary. In addition, as China is casting off its 'century of humiliation' in a bid to become a force in regional affairs, the perception of China as a revisionist power grows in Japan and South Korea. This perception is more likely to lead to regional conflicts (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007: 766).

China as adversary. As a war-defeated nation, Japan's reconstruction and reinvention were initiated by the US, which seized Japan from 1945 to 1952. A primary goal of Japanese foreign policy was handling the alliance with the US and recovering its vanquished status. Besides, because of the US Cold War policy towards Communist China, Japan had no plan to resume ties with China, which was looked down upon as still backward. As a consequence, any essential interaction between a revolutionary China and a vanquished Japan ceased. Furthermore, because the ideological contest

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had been brought in before rapprochement between the two could happen, the sense of their being adversaries became entrenched. Although their diplomatic relations normalized in 1972 and later the cold war ended, the mutual distrust between the two did not end. Currently, whereas the rise of nationalistic sentiments in China revitalizes its animosity against Japan, the new national assertiveness in Japan also identifies China as the unreconstructed 'other' or adversary (Yahuda, 2006: 168).

South Korea's sense of China as an adversary was not as widespread and deep as Japan's. Because both South Korea and China suffered intolerable levels of humiliation and hardship from imperial Japanese aggression, it was easier for them to feel some sense of affinity and to maintain a partnership. Nonetheless, the Korean War was to change all this. While China's decision to protect North Korea by sending in troops might be the best illustration of China's intentions regarding the Korean peninsula, to South Korea it was a repugnant and adversarial intervention intending to obstruct the South Korean-led unification. Thus, for almost four decades (the Korean War and the early 1990s), South Korea's attitude towards China was negative, ranging from indifference to adversarial. China's unconditional support of the North Korean regime led South Korean to consider China an adversary (Chung, 2007: 15). Therefore, given South Korea's negative experiences with China, any growing economic benefits or interdependence cannot ensure the further development of a trustworthy bilateral relationship.

China as revisionist power. China's rise has been met with negative feelings in Japan and South Korea, although South Korea feels less fearful than Japan. The Japanese and South Korean economies were boosted by the fast growth of the Chinese market and the economic integration of the three countries has progressed forcefully. Yet, when the 1997 Asian financial crisis hit South Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries, their economies suffered from economic recession, but China experienced continued high growth and, furthermore, emerged as a military or revisionist power. In other words, at first, because of China's vast size, Japan and South Korea fear that their economies may become wholly subordinate to that of China. As China's economic growth continues, some Japanese and South Korean companies find it difficult to compete with the low-cost goods from China, and concern about the 'hollowing out' of their industries increases (Takahara, 2008: 218–19). In adition to concerns about the economy are concerns about security. Japan and South Korea fear that a robust China will use its mounting economic power mercilessly, as it grows both at the regional level and global level. As a consequence, both Japan and South Korea have become uncomfortable and fearful about China's growing revisionist position. Whereas China hopes that its rise will lead to positive relations, Japan and South Korea fear that China as a revisionist power strives to abuse any relationship for its own interests. Therefore, realist-minded politicians in Japan and South Korea see China as a revisionist power eager to increase its influence without considering its neighbors as equal partners.

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Table 2. *The four models of Northeast Asian regional order*

Chinese Self-Identification \ Others' Identification	Otherness	'we'-ness
Non-Sinocentrism	(1) Nation-State System (Nation and Adversary)	(2) Northeast Asian Community (Asian and Partner)
Sinocentrism	(3) Hegemonic System (Hegemon and Revisionist)	(4) Pax Sinica (*Zhonghua* and *Laoshi*)

The four models of Northeast Asian regional order

There is little doubt that important questions when considering China's rise and its impact on Northeast Asian order are Chinese self-identification and others' identification of China. In other words, China and its neighbors' identification with China might tell us what Northeast Asian regional order looks like. Four generalized prospects of regional order present themselves: (1) non-Sinocentrism (nation) and otherness (adversary) may produce a 'nation-state system'; (2) non-Sinocentrism (Asian) and 'we'-ness (partner) may help build a 'regional community'; (3) Sinocentrism (hegemon) and otherness (revisionist) may breed an 'hegemonic system'; and (4) Sinocentrism (*zhonghua*) and 'we'-ness (*laoshi*) may enhance to construct 'Pax Sinica', as Table 2 demonstrates.

The nation-state system

The first model, the nation-state system, based on a combination of Chinese national consciousness and Japan's and South Korea's perception of adversary, is embedded in a geographically enclosed community which is united by a kind of nationalism. A nation-state system upholds the principle of state sovereignty above all else, rejecting arguments that peaceful regional order building in Northeast Asia is possible. In security terms, this regional system is best understood as a 'regional insecurity complex' or a 'conflict-prone system' in which China, Japan, and South Korea, although dependent on each other, become pitted against the overall stability of the regional system (Buzan, 2010: 6–7). In addition, China, Japan, and South Korea care little about the interests of any other country or constituency in regional affairs. The existing relations among them are hostile and lacking in trust. The mobilized national sentiment is still vigorous and is more likely to lead to conflicts among them.

Chinese leaders, viewing China as 'one among them', have taken the sovereign state as their core unit of outlook since the collapse of the Qing empire. Chinese nationalists who focus on the nationalist theme of the 'century of shame and humiliation' have sought exclusively to maximize their own national interests and preserve their sovereignty on the regional and world stage (Shambaugh, 2013: 31). In a nation-state

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system, China abides by a *status quo* nation led by narrow national interests. Other than defending the narrow national interests, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and its maritime territorial claims, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and the South China Sea as well as human rights, China holds a less revisionist position whilst waiting to check other states' actions before exposing itself. Considering China as a relatively poor nation, its leaders favor concentrating on economic development. This attitude is indicative of China's approach of 'keeping a low profile' based on Deng Xiaoping's addresses such as 'peaceful development (*heping fazhan*)' in 1978 or 'hide our sharpness and bide our time (*taoguang yanghui*)' in 1992 (Ma, 2013: 159). Therefore, China demonstrates its reluctance to shape the Chinese-led regional order, and China is not seen as a contender of the existing US-led regional order.

Japan and South Korea, which view China as an adversary sharing much less 'we'-ness and much more otherness, also tend to see the regional order as anarchic and unpredictable. Thus they place priority on building up a strong nation-state that can steer its own way in the region and counter Chinese forces. Japan and South Korea manage political, security, and economic issues regarding China with a skeptical view, claiming that constructive relations with China are neither possible nor desirable because of incompatible antagonistic nationalism and territorial disputes. Japan and South Korea appear to be proceeding along their own paths of economic growth and development without the need to agree on overarching regional goals. In this 'self-help' regional order, Japan and South Korea are forced to rely on the expansion of domestic military spending and on an international alliance with the US to contain nationalistic China. In this system, the miscalculations between them are likely to escalate into regional conflicts, and peaceful regional order formation with China is not working. Exclusive national identities, mutual mistrust, and lack of regional ideas are consequently mitigating against the emergence of a regional community.

Regional community

The second model for the evolving Northeast Asian regional order is oriented around a regional community founded on Chinese Asian consciousness and Japan's and South Korea's partnership. Regional community refers to the situation whereby the region increasingly turns into a community with Asian consciousness, a distinct 'we'-ness, and partnership, transcending the old state boundaries. Augmented social contacts and transactions among nation-states promote a sense of Asian identity or partnership (Ikenberry, 2011: 344–5). In this system, China prefers peace and stability to expansion and war, defining its identity as a peace-oriented and *status quo* state in the twenty-first century. China is willing to accept the US-led regional order which provides the stability that it needs for its development. China wants to avoid being drawn into conflict with Japan, and the US. Japan and South Korea believe that China is not as ambitious as the US and the Soviet Union, which were vigorously engaged in hegemonism.

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To the Chinese, Asian consciousness as a constituent of many states in Northeast Asia has historically remained frail because the Chinese regarded China itself as Asia or the notion of Asia as the invention of the imperial West/Japan. But with the onset of reforms in 1978, the Chinese awareness of Asia gradually began to change. Chinese reformers came to see it as a structure of possibilities in which China should take part. China deliberately reestablished itself from a revolutionary power committed to revoking the regional order to a partner bounded in that order. In particular, the rise of China and the 1997 Asian financial crisis marked critical junctures for China's regional policies, leading it to be a constructive partner in Northeast Asia (Jo, 2012: 11). Based on Chinese successful economic modernization and growth, there has been a strategic shift from Deng Xiaoping's principle of *taoguang yanghui* to a peaceful rise. In November 2003, the vice president of the Central Party School, Zheng Bijian, expounded a 'peaceful rise' strategy in his landmark speech at the Boao Porum (*BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, 2004). Zheng (2005) contended that in the new world then emerging, China's national interests are served by developing peacefully and contributing actively to a peaceful international environment. Thus, the Beijing leaders have unequivocally stated that the Northeast Asia's neighboring areas are crucial for the realization of China's rise. Official Chinese statements have often used Asianist phrases such as 'partnership of cooperation and competition' with Japan, and 'cooperative partnership of the twenty-first century' with South Korea (Suh, 2012: 13). China's positive approach towards its Northeast Asian neighbors has resulted in a number of participations in the regional community. China's shift to support for Asianism is historic in that, for the first time, China has initiated numerous meaningful regional frameworks.

Similar to South Korea, post-war Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) leadership, has been closely associated with US-led multilateralism. As Japan's partnership with China, strengthened by economic transactions, has been substantial since the 1980s, the so-called East Asian line, later focusing on the ASEAN plus three (APT), emerged (Inoguchi, 2011: 236–7). Economic cooperation was followed by advance in cultural and other transactions at the intergovernmental level. In particular, after the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came into power in 2009, DPJ leaders such as Hatoyama Yukio and Ozawa Ichiro highlighted their policy for settlement of the historical issues with China, emphasizing the importance of building a partnership or fraternal spirit (*yuaiminshushugi*) with China and other Asian countries based on the Northeast Asian community. They described China as their 'extremely important neighboring country' and the US as their equal partner (Cheng, 2011: 249–50). However, in 2012, the DPJ was defeated by the LDP in the general election. Rapid regime change had a negative effect on the bilateral partnership and regional community building.

Given the perpetual enmities of South Koreans towards Japan, their underlying positive and friendly sentiments towards China are indeed special. The 42 year separation now seems remarkably unnatural. Within only two decades, for instance, along with the enormous amount of bilateral trade, investment, and cultural exchanges, Kim Dae-jung developed a 'cooperative partnership' with China, Roh Moo-hyun added

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to the 'comprehensive cooperative partnership', and Lee Myung-bak upgraded their relationship into a 'strategic cooperative partnership' (Suh, 2012: 13). For instance, since the 1997 crisis South Korea has become an increasingly enthusiastic advocate of Northeast Asian community formation along with China. The 1997 crisis was an immeasurable blow to South Korea, and the US was outspokenly blamed by South Korea as the bogeyman that had plundered South Korean prosperity. The South Koreans realized that China was more empathetic than their Western counterparts. Presidents Kim, Roh, and Lee saw that a cooperative partnership with China could ultimately become the vehicle for creating a Northeast Asian community in which they could manage their long-standing economic and security problems, including the nuclear threat from the North Korea. Today's bilateral cooperative partnership between Xi Jinping and Park Geun-hye offers the fact that, like her predecessors, Park views South Korea–China ties as an important cornerstone of '*Trustpolitik* (an approach to the country's foreign and domestic policy that placed trust at the center of policymaking and implementation)' in the Korean peninsula and for regional cooperation in Northeast Asia (*Renminwang shouye*, 2013).

Hegemonic system

The third model is a hegemonic system, hinged on both hegemon and revisionist, which indicates a geographically extensive group of states and peoples ruled by a hegemonic power – for example, the Roman Empire, the Mongol, and Qing Empire. The hegemon's rule, authority, and policymaking processes are centralized and maintained by direct or indirect conquest and control. Regional order depends heavily on the hierarchical structure and on the existence of the hegemon who is not reluctant to persuade its neighbors to do something by using hard power – not benign (*wangdao*), but coercive (*badao*). Thus, China is perceived by Japan and South Korea not as a *status quo* and satisfied power but a revisionist, threatening and malign one (Shambaugh, 2013: 39).

China's rise has been sufficiently successful to restore pride and dignity, wealth and power. It has regained something of the power and status that it lost during the nineteenth century. As China's position abroad grows, hard-power realists, including military groups, argue that China needs to rethink about how to protect nationals, investments, and interests. According to them, one way is to behave like a hegemon. They are not reluctant to argue that China should use its newfound military power, economic strength, and diplomatic leverage to achieve what China desires (Shambaugh, 2013: 32). Therefore it is obvious that China is not happy with its status in the existing regional order, and it perceives the US-led order to be unjust and weighted in favor of Japan, South Korea, and the US. China is no longer detached and indifferent to the regional order. In this context, in 2013 a new leader, Xi Jinping, declared that China's national goals are to make real 'China's dream (*zhongguo meng*)' by achieving national rejuvenation and to establish a 'new kind of great power relationship (*xinxing daguo guanxi*)' as a member of the G2 by handling many of the problems in the region (*China*

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Daily, 2013a, 2013b). At the Boao Forum held on 6 April 2013, Xi pronounced more clearly, 'China should take a more "proactive initiative (*zhudong zuowei*)" in diplomatic approach so as to defend our rights in the process of building "new kind of great power relationship"' (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2013a). He seems to be keen to follow another guideline advocated by Deng Xiaoping – 'accomplish something (*yousuo zuowei*)' – in setting the rules of the game in Northeast Asia, while abandoning China's past 'keeping a low-profile' strategy. In this context, the Beijing's declaration of building a sea power as its national strategy in the coming decade in November 2012, its establishment of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in November 2013, and its initiation to construct the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on which delegates from 57 countries signed an agreement in June 2015 are not surprising at all. However, China's behavior suggests that it is no longer inclined to play according to US and, in particular, Japanese 'rules of the game', while seeking to build its own regional norms and rules.

In a hegemonic system, Japan is most negative and fearful about China's rise. Beijing's burgeoning military power has annoyed Japan and led to conflicts with Japan over disputed islands and maritime rights. Japan, having plunged into a long period of recession, finds China threatening, given that a powerful and assertive China is an utterly new experience in Japan's modern history, and, more importantly, China holds a strong anti-Japanese sentiment as a result of the Japanese invasion of China in the past and also its unapologetic attitude towards China. Meanwhile, the rise of China as a regional hegemon has an impact on the spirit of Japanese extreme nationalism. Abe Shinzo, who returned to power in December 2012, reshuffled Japan's relations with China. Recognizing that Japan had lost much ground to China in the regional sphere and considering China as a revisionist power, Abe gives emphasis to a 'dynamic deterrence' and 'active defense' so as to react efficiently and promptly to Chinese encroachments into the disputed areas, while expanding its own marine corps, improving its ability for military intelligence, establishing a national security council, declaring an inherent right to collective self-defense, and revising its defense policy (Japanese Cabinet Secretary, 2013). He is also eager to strengthen relations with countries at China's periphery as well as with the US, with the explicit aim of limiting China's influence. Abe is also taking advantage of using the perception of the China threat for his ambitions to emerge as a 'normal state'. Therefore, in a hegemonic system, the escalating tensions, on issues ranging from historic problems to differing territorial claims between the two countries, are unavoidable.

Unlike Japan, for South Korea China was not seen as a primary or urgent peril because the past events led to relatively positive feelings. Yet, South Korea also finds itself unready to accept China as a regional hegemon, and some cynical views of China have begun to develop. Such views were first found in business areas, and were largely centred on the likelihood of South Korea being left behind by China, but the more negative views have been affecting attitudes to past events – China's claim over Korea's ancient kingdom, Koguryo, in 2004 – and to security areas – China's

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position to Cheonan warship incident in 2010 and China's declaration of ADIZ in 2013 (Klingner, 2004; Chung, 2009: 212). China has demonstrated that it does not want confrontation with South Korea, sending messages to settle areas of discord through negotiation and dialogue. This is in contrast to China's reaction to Japan where there could be no bargaining to the territorial dispute and history issue (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2013b). Nevertheless, the South Koreans fear that China's moves may reveal an offensive and revisionist strategy to obtain northern Korean territory after Korean reunification and to take Yeodo (Suyan) in the South Sea over which China has insisted jurisdiction based on the logic that the reef is a portion of its continental shelf. Those events have led South Korea to reassess its growing strategic relationship with China.

Pax Sinica

The fourth model is Pax Sinica, related to both *zhonghua* and *laoshi*, which constitutes voluntary accommodation of the peripheral states, Japan and South Korea, towards China as *zhonghua* which generates regional peace and prosperity. In this model, China is not seen as a predatory coercive power or a hegemon (*badao*), but that it leads as a role model, with generosity and responsibility (*wangdao*). Thus, Japan and South Korea pay homage to *laoshi* China, in the hope of receiving special rewards. Originally, Pax Sinica was usually the periods of rule by the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties when China maintained the *zhonghua* status in the region, due to its political, economic, military, and cultural power. Thus, Pax Sinica is the period of peace in Northeast Asia, maintained by Chinese benign power and authority. The Chinese economy, commerce, culture, and science should prosper. The Chinese civilization must become open and cosmopolitan to all people from near and far away.

China seems to have never withdrawn from a sort of *zhonghua* mentality. The rise of China gave a powerful boost to pride in *zhonghua* and inspired the concept of Pax Sinica as the foundation of regional order. Given the far-reaching resources in China's cultural repository for Chinese elites to fall back on, Pax Sinica as a narrative is reasonable and expected. For instance, Wang Hui (2010: 12–18) in his book, *From an Asian Perspective*, also paid attention to restoring the pre-modern tributary system in Northeast Asia, saying that the tributary system, so-called trans-systemic society (*kuatixishehui*)', in which Northeast Asian countries kept a mutually autonomous and flexible relationship is the most suitable scheme to overcome the nation-state system imported from, and imposed by, the West. Like hegemonist Yan Xuetong regarded the US-led regional order as illegitimate, but Yan (2013: 185–6) in his new book, *Inertia of History*, also emphasized reestablishment of Northeast Asian regional order through the redemption of Pax Sinica based on China's traditional values li (*courtesy*), *xin* (trust), yi (righteousness), which, he believes, are more universal than the western concepts of equality, democracy, and liberty. Both authors argued that the successful recovery of Pax Sinica depends on how China frees itself from its self-doubt and unassertiveness and regains its *zhonghua* status by means of Confucianism-based traditions. Their works fascinated the Chinese decision-makers as well as intellectuals. They demonstrate that

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Pax Sinica can become a goal of Chinese foreign policy as Chinese-style solutions to regional and global problems, while winning adulation for its purported success at home and abroad.

Chinese leaders may hope the rise of China could gently move to a friendly and non-threatening relation within Pax Sinica. However, Japan is mostly skeptical of the merits of reviving the classic Pax Sinica. Mizoguchi Yuzo (2004) criticized Chinese attempts to build the Chinese-led regional order, so-called Pax Sinica, as the twenty-first century version of the tributary system, in that China puts again itself at the heart and marginalizes its neighbors. Japan, although receptive to Chinese overtures in past centuries, is resistant to any possible repeat of their subordination to China which today is 'an empty center' without core values and, more importantly, is not seen as *laoshi* (rather, the US became its *laoshi*). Because the confrontation with Japan, and the West, has revealed Chinese historical or cultural retardation, Japan does not doubt that China could no longer claim a historical identity of any kind, or to reaffirm its past as the source of new ideas or norms in resignation to perpetual retardation. In addition, they regard China as an authoritarian, non-transparent, undemocratic society.

Like Japan, as a sovereign state for more than half a century, it is unthinkable for South Korea to accept anything not based on national equality as an organizing principle for a new regional order (Acharya, 2003/04: 150–7). Although the positive aspects of Pax Sinica, stressing peace and harmony, are conducive to maintaining stability not only within China but also in the region, the aggressive promotion of Pax Sinica is regarded as cultural imperialism or as an hegemonic system in South Korea. Nonetheless, South Korean's feel fewer anxieties regarding China's rise as Pax Sinica than the Japanese do. In fact, South Korea has pursued a dual foreign policy: 'the security counts on the US and the economy clings to China'. Kim Daejung, the editor of a conservative newspaper, *Chosun* Daily, and a staunch pro-American, insisted that this policy reached already the limit 'because the country, which will exert the most vital influence on a matter of South Korea's security and economy, is not the US but China' (Kim, 2013). In addition, according to *Seoul Economic Daily*'s survey in 2014, 51.3% of respondents in South Korea favor South Korea's neutral position between the US and China; 24.4% hold that South Korea has to live more closely with China, while 22.2% with the US. In this context, President Park Geun-hye's participation in Beijing's celebrations of China's victory over Japan during World War II in early September 2015 (although Washington reportedly opposed to Park's presence) is not unexpected. It demonstrates that South Korea seemingly highlights a dual foreign policy, but it is evident that South Korea's center of gravity is genuinely moving from the US to China.

An advent of multifaceted order in Northeast Asia

As Amartya Sen (2006: xii–xiii) has noted, despite the tendency to see identifications as fixed and singular, people hold a number of different identifications simultaneously. Identification which has evolved over time has been its multifaceted nature. Not only individuals but also nation-states have various identifications. In other

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words, the Sinocentric and non-Sinocentric identification and 'we'-ness and otherness of Japan and South Korea go side by side on every occasion, surfacing and resurfacing in different combinations as dictated by the development of new events at home and abroad, ultimately helping to constitute a multitude of different regional orders.

Today China, with non-Sinocentrism, as a *status quo* power, is attempting exclusively to shield its sovereignty in a 'nation-state system' and to participate in a 'regional community' by launching various significant regional frameworks. At the same time, as a revisionist, China, with the advantage of Sinocentrism, is eager to create the rules and structures of regional order according to its own preferences in an 'hegemonic system' and 'Pax Sinica'. Japan and South Korea, sharing a sense of 'we'-ness with China, are showing their enthusiasm to accommodate with China on matters of peaceful and harmonious regional order as a form of 'regional community' or 'Pax Sinica' beyond national identities. Simultaneously, both Japan and South Korea, emphasizing otherness towards China, are viewing China as the unreconstructed adversary and are resisting the Chinese-led hegemonic system, in spite of economic interdependence and economic benefits. These 'multilogic' identifications lead to a number of distinct regional orders, depending on the context.

Founded on a combination of Chinese national consciousness and Japan's and South Korea's perception of China as an adversary, the Northeast Asian regional order is rooted in the nation-state system that has existed since Japan's defeat in 1945. The historical experience of losing their sovereignty has led China and South Korea to be deeply aware that only the nation-state is able to offer peace and security. Japan, surrounded by 'modern' states, including China and North and South Korea which promote their nationalism, also attempts to strengthen its nationalism. In this order, Japan and South Korea have engaged in the US-centric 'hub and spokes' system, depending bilaterally on their alliance with the US to subdue nationalist China. This system has the potential to continue into the future, but the structure is not sufficient to capture what is taking place in the region, given that forces of regional order building such as regional community formation are emerging.

Northeast Asia, which is rapidly becoming a seamless web of interconnections and interdependencies, has since the 1990s been slowly observing the evolution of a regional community with a multilateral structure. Unlike Western powers and Japan (which insists on being not Asian at all and declaring itself part of the West), China has always been part of the region. According to Tang (2009: 14), China knows that the region can be rebuilt only through cooperation of all the states within the region, including China. Thus, China has engaged in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the annual trilateral summit meetings between China, Japan, and Korea, the six-party talks, and with the APT as a genuine partner, putting itself at the center of diplomacy over the future of North Korea. Although recently the East Asian descent in Japan impacts badly on the momentum of regional community building, Japan's partnership with China, backed by economic interdependence, is not entirely hurt. Founded on the common historical experiences of both China and

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South Korea with regard to Japanese imperialism, recently South Korea is widening its partnership to work with China. It is said that today their partnership is stronger than ever.

Although mutual cooperation is deepening, regional community building is not, as a result of China's refocus on Sinocentrism and Japan's and South Korea's growing sense of otherness. The rising power of China, along with its success in economic development in the 1990s and the Beijing Olympics, and the US-caused global financial crisis in 2008, which brought about the weakening image of US leadership, all reinforce Sinocentrism, which is expressed as a form of hegemon or *zhonghua* (Buzan, 2010: 18–19).

Today, Xi Jinping's 'proactive initiative' suggests that an hegemonic system is now also emerging. In other words, China seeks to seize back primacy in Northeast Asia because the current US-led regional order perpetuates the humiliation in the eyes of Chinese leaders. China is sending messages that China's rise is inescapable and that Japan and South Korea should make the decision as to whether they want to be China's companion or opponent. China is also not hesitant in attempting to achieve what it longs for or to reveal its displeasure. When Japan and South Korea make a move for which China feels distaste, China says, 'know your place'. Thus, Japan and South Korea are coerced into repositioning themselves (Allison and Blackwill, 2013: 2–7). Japan strongly opposes a Chinese-led hegemonic system. Following decades of pacifism and strategic marginalization, Japan is now shaking up regional affairs by responding strenuously to China's rise as a regional hegemon. South Korea also does not expect that a strong China will be as benign as the US has been since 1945. China's current moves show China as more self-assured and willing to take tough positions.

There is too a latent factor of Pax Sinica hovering in the background. In Pax Sinica, China does not need to fight over Northeast Asia. China is gradually and steadily attracting Japan and South Korea into its Pax Sinica, based on China's principles of benevolence and virtue, by extending its economic links with its neighbors and providing them with its market of 1.3 billion consumers: 'The Chinese magnet began to pull the region into its orbit' (Allison and Blackwill, 2013: 3–7). Needless to say, China anticipates Japan and South Korea will be more respectful towards China as it becomes more powerful. However, Japan and South Korea are worried that China may want to return to the imperial position it had in earlier centuries, when they were treated as vassal states having to pay tribute to China, although some South Koreans are less afraid of China's refurbishment of Pax Sinica.

In sum, Northeast Asian regional order is essentially embedded in the nation-state system; Northeast Asia is steadily establishing a multilateral arrangement; China's recent rhetoric and actions suggest that a hegemonic system is arising; and a century after the fall of imperial China, Pax Sinica becomes again a cornerstone to claims of China's *zhonghua*? Thus, what is appearing in the Northeast Asian region is a 'multifaceted and multidirectional blended' system that assigns components of the aforementioned models. Like the blind men Northeast Asian specialists have idolized one of the parts of

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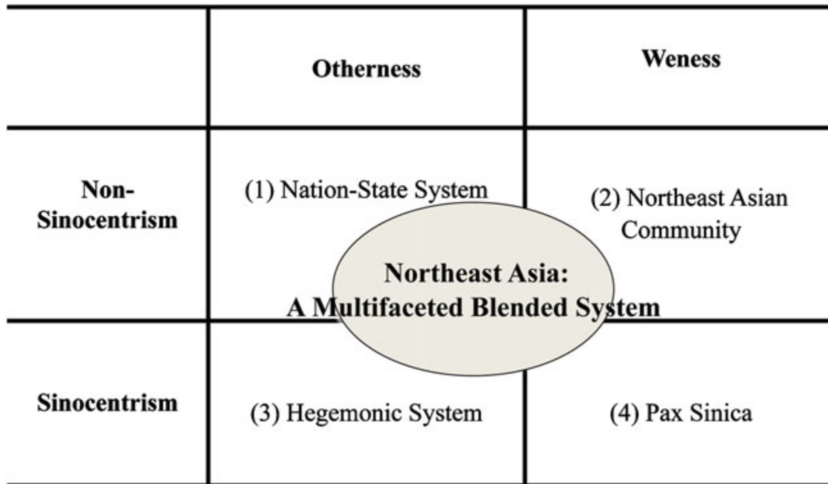

Figure 1. An advent of multifaceted order in Northeast Asia

what is taking place in Northeast Asia because contemporary Northeast Asian regional order is none of a nation-state system, a hegemonic system, a regional community, or an old-fashioned tianxia system. Rather, as Figure 1 manifests, Northeast Asian regional order is somewhere between a *vigorous* nation-state system, a *growing* regional community, an *emerging* hegemonic system, and an *unripe* Pax Sinica system.

Conclusion

Northeast Asia is now witnessing the appearance of a multifaceted system accompanied by a striking transitional moment when the regional order in which China and its neighbors have played a part is changing (Buzan, 2010: 18). At this turning point, more and more Chinese expect that China will find itself a key player in the regional community, a hegemon or the heart of the Pax Sinica in the region. It means that the Chinese-led regional order challenges the current 'hub and spokes' system which was invented by the US. It is because 'two tigers cannot live together in a mountain (*yishan burong lianghu*)', as an ancient Chinese proverb says. Yet, given that China acknowledges that it requires the US market, technology, and new ideas (Allison and Blackwill, 2013: 12), as Xi Jinping declared, there is an 'agreeable space in Pacific Ocean where two tigers can coexist' (Jin, 2012). In addition, as illustrated through China's 'One Belt, One Road' (yidai yilu) initiative, China seems to set its foreign policy as follows: a balanced response to and management of the East – Northeast Asia (*donguan*); active advancement towards the West – Central Asia (*xijin*), new expansionism towards the South – Southeast Asia (*nankai*); strengthening of cooperation with the North – Russia (*beihe*). In other words, China seeks to avoid any movements that will damage relationships with the US in Northeast Asia, while welcoming the US presence in the

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region and working within existing liberal regional norms rather than overturning them. Thus, fortunately, unlike US–Soviet relations during the Cold War, there is no inexorable conflict between the US and China – although contest for influence in the region is unavoidable. These circumstances provide a far-ranging opportunity for China, Japan, and South Korea to build their own epoch-making peaceful and stable regional order along with US support.

Yet, whereas the current multifaceted system is founded on the cooperation and competition between China and the US, it also contains implicitly and explicitly an 'Asian paradox'. Given that Northeast Asia, which is emerging as an engine of world economic growth, is the most dynamic and interdependent region in the world today, the state of regional security is not to support but to disturb regional integration or peaceful community building. There is also growing unease between the Chinese tendency to move forward a hegemonic system or Pax Sinica and Japan's and South Korea's aversion to it. In addition, both Japan and South Korea are afraid of the Chinese-led regional order, but it does not mean that their relationship is 'constant' in the face of the rise of China, as shown by the fact that today's relations between Japan and South Korea are much worse than those between China and South Korea. Exclusive nationalism, territorial disputes, and the 'history problem', including the comfort woman issue between Japan and South Korea, make matters even worse for peaceful regional order building. Thus, the twenty-first century is the 'Asian century', but the Northeast Asia region is seen as seemingly 'ripe for rivalry' due to Northeast Asia's lack of stability-enhancing mechanisms of the kind that sustain peace and to its failure to remove the shackles of a history of mutual distrust and hatred. In this century, Northeast Asia encounters risks as well as opportunities.

China seems to aspire to rebuilding Pax Sinica rather than a regional community and hegemonic system, while being endowed with a nation as well off and empowered as Japan, the US, and Europe. The Chinese expect that this scenario will most probably become fully achieved in the near future. It assumes that China can succeed in resolving its heavy internal difficulties and changing business culture by reducing corruption, forming new mindsets, maintaining its overall economic development, and carrying out political reforms which make it appealing to its neighbors. China can also draw on universal ideals that might in principle be suitable for the rest of the region (Yahuda, 2006: 180). However, despite remarkable economic achievements over the last three decades, the Chinese economy may be unsuccessful in catching up as fast as in the past with the leading world economies, and may get stuck in a so-called middle-income trap, as the 2015 Chinese stock market clash reveals. In addition, so far, China does not own the universal ideas, which can attract and assimilate talent from other societies in the world. It is not properly situated to enable its benign Sinocentrism or *laoshi* role to be acceptable to Japan and South Korea. Both Japan and South Korea believe that the traditional Chinese universal ideas were already moribund and China is not anymore *laoshi*. The Japanese and South Koreans, therefore, view the rise of China as a threat to Japan's and South Korea's national interests and the existing regional order, even

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though South Korea is certainly more amenable to a symbiotic relationship with China than Japan is.

The possibility of gaining genuine status as the heart of Pax Sinica still seems remote, given China's relative lack of moral leadership and soft power. The resurrection of nationalistic feelings in Japan and South Korea identifies China as a revisionist 'hegemon' rather than *laoshi*. Therefore, if China cannot be fully integrated into the regional community or Japan and South Korea cannot foster the sense of 'we'-ness, an 'hegemonic system' bounded by a nation-state structure is more likely to be the most conspicuous order in the future. In this system, because Japan and South Korea would fail to build cooperative relations with China, or to accommodate an hegemonic China, it would inevitably continue to create some tensions and even armed conflicts, overriding economic interdependence, as demonstrated by the recent disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and ADIZ which raise the threat of military conflict between China and Japan.

To avoid regional conflict and, more importantly, to build a peaceful and stable regional order, it would require a number of developments. Firstly, any new developments require that all of them be mutually trusting. Based on mutual trust, the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands between China and Japan, the Dokdo/Takeshima conflict between Japan and South Korea, and 'history problem' among them all have to be resolved. Secondly, China has to thoroughly integrate itself into the regional community of Northeast Asia, committing to regional identity, so as to minimize the crisis. Meanwhile, as Sun Yat-sen – who felt deep disappointment to Japan's expansionism a century ago – urged to Japan to choose *wangdao* and to abandon *badao*, this time China must embrace the moral Confucian politics and reject the unethical Machiavellian power politics. Thirdly, it also requires that Japan and South Korea, while recognizing China's domestic challenges, commit themselves to cooperate with China to create new regional norms and rules. It is true, given the interconnectedness, that Japan and South Korea are accountable to some extent for China's difficulties. Finally, South Korea and, in particular, Japan cannot hold back China's rise. Rather, they should accept China as a great nation, celebrate its comeback, and pay homage to China as an old-*laoshi*. China should also behave like a genuine partner and laoshi, while making its promise to appreciate its neighbors' national interests and to provide autonomy and security. If these developments do not place, China, Japan, and South Korea, trapped in an 'Asian Paradox', are more likely to face a precarious and unpleasant tomorrow.

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