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# The Idea of New International Order China Is Seeking and An East Asia Community (2)

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## 2. China's National Strategy and Asia-Oriented Foreign Policy

Crucial changes in China's national strategy and foreign policy strategy were articulated at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, held in November 2002. The national strategy adopted at the party congress first called for the "great restoration of the Chinese nation" and put forth the goal of realizing an all-round "well-off society" by quadrupling gross domestic product (GDP) between 2000 and 2020 to more than \$4 trillion. This goal meant that China would seek to rank with Japan in terms of the overall size of its economy and bring its per-capita GDP up to the level of a middle-income country. When China, already a "political power" and a "military power," announces the intention to rank with the world's No. 2 economically as well, it is tantamount to declaring the intent of seeking to become the world's second power, next only to the United States, both in name and reality.

What, then, are the characteristics of the external strategy China intends to pursue under the above-described grand strategy? The changes in China's foreign policy made at the 16th Party Congress can be summarized as follows. First, compared with the 15th Party Congress, greater emphasis was laid on the advocacy of world peace and the promotion of co-prosperity. This is linked to the idea of the so-called "peaceful rising," proposed in 2003 by Zheng Bijian, vice president of the Central Party School (described in more detail below). Second, it gained a greater sense of participation in the international society as a "responsible power," and became more enthusiastic about participating in international affairs, in order to seek harmonious coexistence between countries with a varied degree of strength without seeking the status of a single dominant nation. Third, it sought to expand and enrich the scope of areas of cooperation in order to enhance the effects of cooperation. This third point indeed is directly linked to the promotion of regional cooperation in East Asia, and will be considered more thoroughly later.

It appears that an important change took place in China's basic perception of the international structure, a factor that needs to be taken into account in considering the shift in China's external strategy. As is well known, China essentially viewed the basic structure of international society in the post-Cold War period as a "period of transition to a multipolarized world." The "poles," needless to say, mean "powerful nations," and China believed that the basic way for stabilizing

the international order would be a process of adjustment and balancing between the plural poles. This was China's "perception" but at the same time was a "strategy of multipolarization" in the sense that China wanted to avoid the United States becoming the "single power" and sought to build a new international order through harmony among three or more powers (poles) that were relatively close in strength.

At present, China does not reject the idea of the multipolarization itself, but it appears that it is beginning to change the meaning of the term significantly. For example, Wang Yi, former vice foreign minister and currently ambassador to Japan, characterizes the shift in the "perception of multipolarization" as follows. Instead of viewing multipolarization as a system of adjustments among powerful nations, China now: (1) embraces the idea of harmonious coexistence of countries with varying degrees of strength, (2) regards developing countries as important elements of the multipolarized structure, and (3) considers multipolarization as an objective trend but seeks "equality and cooperation, and harmonious coexistence" among countries. Prof. Yie Zicheng of Peking University also points out that "the idea of multipolarization includes opposition to hegemonism and unilateralism by the United States."

What brought about these changes in China's perception of the international structure and its strategy? Needless to say, the first factor behind these changes was the shift in China's perception of its own strength following the significant increase in its "comprehensive national strength" with economic background that has shown sustained growth for over a quarter of a century. In the era of former strongman Deng Xiaoping, China indeed was "still a small country with little strength" and its basic approach was, "defense is the main strategy." Today, however, China, as it grows out of this "passive" approach, has come to view itself as having acquired the strength to participate in international society "at its own initiative and more actively."

Secondly, however, the increased awareness of its own strength has tended to increase China's awareness of the threat from the United States. After seeing the dramatic advances in the United States' high-tech military capability in the Gulf War, the Afghan War and the Iraq War, and in the wake of the afore-mentioned bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the April 2001 incident where a U.S. reconnaissance plane was forced to land on Hainan Island, China became keenly aware that the United States is the only nation capable of mounting a serious strike against it. In the United States, there is a persistent view, particularly among hardliners, that China remains a "potential enemy." Shi Yinghong underscores China's apprehensions about the United States by pointing out that "in the last two or three years, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the supremacy and hegemonistic posture of the United States have reached unprecedented levels. Also, the U.S. tendency to seek to prevent China from acquiring strong military power and international political power is unprecedented.

Further, the third factor is the steady spread of a way of thinking toward international cooperation among China's policymakers, advisers and academic circles. They increasingly

argue for a structure of multilateral and regional interdependence and mutual development to replace the power politics approach that forms the basis of the “polar structure.” The reasons for these developments are: (1) With China itself integrated into the structure of international interdependence, mainly economically, as well as into the framework of international “dependent coprosperity,” China has come to the strong realization that international economic cooperation provides the foundation for its development and the expansion of its overall national strength; (2) liberalism has emerged and gained growing influence among researchers in China’s think-tanks, policy advisers and scholars in international relations, particularly among those with experience studying in Western countries; (3) China is taking initiatives as a “responsible power” with the principle of respect for international cooperation, and (4) at least over the short and medium term, China is sticking to a cooperative approach as its strategy toward the United States, considering that its current policy priority is to convey the importance of China-U.S. cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the six-party consultations on the Korean Peninsula, not to give an excuse to the United States to take a hard-line stance toward itself, and to draw the United States into its strategy toward Taiwan as a means to isolate Taiwan.

China began to question the effectiveness of the idea of multipolarization, and is now sticking to the cooperative approach toward the United States while feeling increasingly threatened by it. In this context, China’s policymakers began to move toward the idea of turning East Asia into a regional space as a sort of an entity with common interests that reflects China’s intentions and interests. This led to the birth of the concept of an “East Asia Community” in line with the Chinese thinking. This issue is discussed in detail below.

**(This is the text of an article by Prof. AMAKO Satoshi, Professor of Waseda University and Member of the Council on East Asian Community, which was originally posted on the website of “Amako Ajia-ron” (<http://eac.cocolog-nifty.com/amako/>).)**