The Future Role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region: Dead End or Crossroad?

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The Asian-Pacific Strategy is all along one of the most important diplomatic strategies of the U.S. government. Here, in this more and more active region, are geo-politics and geo-economy advantages that the U.S. has been coveting for a long time. The region is home to both important allies and democratic followers, and meanwhile its most powerful competitors and most competitive environment. This paper argues that under the brand-new international pattern of politics and economy, due to the rise of new powers within the Asian-Pacific region as well as the hit of economy risk, the U.S.’s decline in power and popularity means that it must reconsider its role in the region. It is standing at the crossroad on the way back to the leading role of the Asian-Pacific region, and during the following process, it will make a series of adjustments to achieve the goal.

Keywords: United States; Future Role; Asia-Pacific; Strategy

As is well known, the Asia-Pacific strategy is one of the core diplomatic strategies of the U.S. government. No other areas are as significant as the Asia-Pacific Region\(^1\) in terms of the number impact factors, complicated situations and relevance. Here in this vital region is the advantage of geo-politics and geo-economics that the U.S. has been long coveting; the important allies and followers of American democracy; as well as its most powerful rival and fierce competitor. Nowadays, there are new adjustment and changes of the U.S.’s political and economic situation: President Obama has taken office under the slogan of “Reform”; the economic crisis, with an unstoppable trend of spreading, has hard hit the U.S. Under these circumstances, though the U.S. is busy with internal affairs, it never stops returning to the Asia-Pacific Region, and has in fact attached more importance to the area. However, the road back to the Asia-Pacific Region is not as smooth as it once was, and now the U.S. is actually standing at a critical crossroads: the U.S. cannot stop the lust of returning due to the vested interest and the crucial strategic position of the

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\(^1\) There are two kinds of understanding of the definition of “the Asia-Pacific Region”. The first one refers to the concept mentioned in AEPIC, mainly including Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, etc.), East Asia (China, Japan and South Korea), North America (the United States, Canada, Mexico, etc.), Latin America (Chile, Peru, etc.) and some countries along Pacific Coast. The second one refers to the one usually mentioned in some publications and the UN reports, including Asia region (East Asian and Southeast Asia), Oceania and islands in the Pacific Ocean, which are along the west Pacific Coast. The second one is adopted in this paper.
Asia-Pacific Region, but its awkward status quo of being a dominant power may cause numerous difficulties. Thus, in order to carry its Asia-Pacific strategy forward more effectively, the United States must start a series of adjustment.

**In terms of economy, the U.S. has gradually lost its prestige and leading role, but there is no complete collapse of its overall power position.**

For a long time, the United States, with its abundant economic strength, has been playing a balancing role in the Asia-Pacific Region. The countries within this region have been largely dependent on the U.S.’s market and economic scale, with a specific focus on its high-tech industry, which has brought substantial inexpensive raw material to the U.S. and won its reputation and position in the region as well. However, in recent years, there’s been economic dislocation in the U.S., and especially since the economic crisis, the U.S.’s economy has been struggling, suffering from a sudden “stroke,” which has had a detrimental influence on its role and position in the Asia-Pacific Region. Meanwhile, the emerging economies that have risen during the process of economic globalization have been less influenced by the economic crisis as the United States, and these economies have gradually began to show a more sustainable development. Therefore, the U.S.’s economic position is losing its gloss and prestige. According to reports from the IMF, “In recent years, the characteristic of globalization is the diversification of structure and destination of export. The proportion of exportation of developing countries in their real GDP has been increasing since 1980s, and that of Asia has been over 20%”.2 Apparently, while the manufacturing level of developing countries is improving, there is a falling trend of the manufacturing industry of the U.S., which has suffered from slow growth originally. Moreover, the quick development of internal trade in Asia is also an important factor that causes the decrease of the U.S.’s economic influence in this region. For example, in 2007 the trade volume of ten countries of ASEAN plus China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan has account for 55% of their total trade volume, while the proportion was only 43% in 1990.3 According to theory of decoupling, the emerging economies are not expected to be influenced by the decrease of the economies of the developed countries, a fact which will obviously be reflected in Asia. Within this region, the rise of China and India has drawn worldwide attention. In accordance with the investigative report of Goldman Sachs, it is estimated that India’s economy could be larger than Japan’s by 2032, and China’s larger than the US by 2041 and larger than everyone else's as early as 2016.4 In lieu of these facts, Lee Kwan Yew, the Senior Minister of Singapore, once pointed out that due to the ever-increasing trade and investment within this region, Asia’s economic dependency

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Backed by the economic growth of both China and India, even with the U.S. economy in a downturn, Asia's economy will not suffer too serious a defeat. By this token, the intra-regional emerging economies have enabled Asian countries to feel very confident about local economic development, which has also proved that the U.S.’s economic influence has been down.

“The key issue of the U.S. problem is economic depression, for its world power and influence are both supported by its abundant national asset”. For a long time, the U.S.’s economy has been driven by debt and deficit, and its debt problem has been serious all along. From 1970 to 2010, except for a short period during the Clinton administration when there was no deficit, the U.S. Government’s debt has been going through a substantial increase. As is deduced in the budget from the Executive Office of the White House and the Government, around 2009, the total debt of the federal government would increase to 10.6 trillion US dollars, which would account for 72% of GDP (Chart).

Chart. The proportion of the federal government’s debt in GDP during 1970-2010


In the new century, the U.S.’s debt-driven pro-growth model proved its toxicity in the financial crisis of 2008. The Obama administration has begun to put forward a reform plan, hoping to transform the mode of economic development stimulated by excessive credit into a more prudent one. Since the financial crisis, the U.S.’s trade status, long supported by the special status of US dollar, has faced a serious crisis. And the most serious crisis lies in the neglect of manufacturing industry, which leads to a lack of basic consumer goods in the United States. Subsequently, it is difficult to boost domestic demand and consumption, and the dollar's downward trajectory means it’s impossible to realize trade growth by exporting manufactured goods.

However, the scale-down of the U.S. economy and the decrease of its influence in the Asia-Pacific Region are only relative to the high pace of the emerging economies. In fact, the current economic crisis in the U.S. is very complicated.

5 Retrospect and prospect of world economy IV: Trade Protectionism Rises, Regional Trade Increases.

6 David S. Mason. The End of the American Century. Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc.

7 David S. Mason. The End of the American Century. Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc.
Compared with the main economies of the world, the United States is still in good standing. For example, European Union, the main economic rival of the U.S., has also suffered a lot of economic difficulties. The U.S.’s advantage is that its GDP accounts for 1/4 of World GDP, and this will not be overtaken in short time.\(^8\) In conclusion, the United States has not completely lost its economic advantage in the Asia-Pacific Region, but it’s becoming increasingly clear that its position is facing a challenge from the emerging economies, and its influence and prestige have been weakened.

There is a gulf between the United States’ ability and its wish on the administration of the regional security in East Asia, and its allies are less willing to bear the duty regional security.

The U.S.’s strong military power is definitely the safeguard for its role of vindicator in the Asia-Pacific Region, but the economic downturn has brought a great test of its administration of regional security.

First, there are more and more labile factors in the Asia-Pacific Region, which makes it stickier for the United States to get involved in security problems herein. A number of crisis issues are threatening the regional security, such as the South China Sea issue, the Taiwan issue and the North Korean nuclear issue. The South China Sea issue has always had a great impact on the security situation in the Asia-Pacific Region. In order to make the first move in the conflict, some countries in Southeast Asia, like Vietnam, has involved some powers beyond this region, such as Great Britain and the United States, which also makes South China issues that are already complicated, much more daunting. Besides, the Taiwan issue has also become a hot potato for the U.S. It is confusing for the U.S. to figure it out whether it should egg Taiwan to remain apart from Mainland China or encourage Taiwan get closer to it. In recent years, the U.S.’s arm sales to Taiwan have been a cause for Chinese opposition to U.S. policy in the region, and it has also forces U.S. to make the decision as to which ally to potentially lose, Taiwan or Mainland China. On the North Korean nuclear issue, the United States has always wanted to play a leading role in order to cement the relationship with its ally South Korean, and in the meantime to assure its leading position in Asia-Pacific affairs. However, things do not always turn out the way the United States would prefer. The permanent tough stance taken by North Korea was unexpected by the United States. No matter which administration, Bush’s, Clinton’s or Obama’s, nobody can effectively solve the North Korean nuclear issue. The Six-Party Talks are fruitless and the relationship between South Korea and North Korea is worsening; both of these issues have not only damaged the U.S.’s image, but have also brought the U.S.’s leading position into a pretty pass.

Secondly, the cohesiveness of the system of security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region, which the U.S. has been building for a long time, has been

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\(^8\) According to the statistical data of Economic Research Service, from 1969 to 2009, U.S.’s GDP had accounted for 25.74% to 28.46 in World GDP, and GDP of the 15 countries joining into European Union last century had fallen drastically from 35.78% to 27%. In 2009, GDP of China accounted for 6.96%, and that of India was 2.12%. Data source: Real Historical Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Shares and Growth Rates of GDP Shares, http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Macroeconomics; 2 Nov, 2009
weakened as well. Its allies are all trying to reduce their dependence on the United States in the area of national defense and are trying to pursue national defense independence, or at least a more equal partner relationship. The rise of China in the region has had a passive influence on the U.S.’s security administration, and its main allies, like Japan, Australia and South Korea, have had to concentrate on their own security needs. According to the new national defense policy of Australia, the government should be dedicated on its own security needs, since “it is the Government’s view that it would be premature to judge that war among states, including the major powers, has been eliminated as a feature of the international system. While growing economic and other interdependencies between states will act as a brake on the resort to force between them, and high-intensity wars among the major powers are not likely over the period to 2030, such wars cannot be ruled out”.9

Such a forecast is based on the “China threat” theory, which says “the pace, scope and structure of China’s military modernization have the potential to give its neighbors cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans.”10 In such circumstances, Australia does assume that “except in the case of nuclear attack, Australia has to provide for its own local defense needs without relying on the combat forces of other countries.”11

As for South Korea, as early as 2002, it began to reconsider its dependence on the U.S. for national defense, and has made some adjustments to The Status of Agreement of USFK so as to facilitate future development of the relationship between South Korea and the United States. After that, since the DPRK Nuclear Crisis has become more inflamed, and because there was no effective fruition of the Six-Party Talks presided by the regional powers together with the U.S., South Korea found it increasingly necessary to reconsider its security dependence on the U.S. South Korea put forward a new reform act on national defense, equipped ship-bone Aegis radar and computer systems for air defense, and strengthened its long-range attack ability, all of which indicate South Korea tends to reduce its security on the United States.

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In a word, the diminished administrative capacity of the U.S. causes its allies to be suspicious of its leading position in the Asia-Pacific Region, and makes them less willing to take too much responsibility for regional security. As Paul Kennedy said in his book The Rise and Fall of Great Powers, “if a state overextends itself strategically…it runs the risk that the potential benefits from external expansion may be outweighed by the great expense of it all—a dilemma which becomes acute if the nation concerned has entered a period of relative economic decline.”14 Now his judgment of 20 years ago has become a reality in that the U.S.’s weaknesses and dilemmas on many security issues in the Asia-Pacific Region have led to its allies’ ever-increasing centrifugal stress.

However, although the allies of the United States are less active in taking responsibility for global and regional security affairs, it doesn’t yet mean that they are trying to divorced form the U.S. immediately, but rather they still attach importance to their relationships with the U.S. For example, Japan, which always wants to become a normal country, still realizes the significance of its alliance with the U.S.. The Prime Minister of Japan, Yukio Hatoyama, pointed it out that “the Security and Safeguard System between Japan and the United States has contributed a lot to the prosperity and stability of both Japan and the rest of the Asia-Pacific Region, and for the future, the existence of the U.S. military force will still be the public wealth that enable countries in the Asia-Pacific Region to feel comfortable about security. In order to adapt to the new situation in the 21st century and deepen the relationship between Japan and the U.S., the two countries will work together to strengthen the allied relation”.15 “It is the Japan-America allied relation that enables Japan to consolidate cooperation with countries in Asia including China”.16 Meanwhile, Australia also understands the significance of Washington as well as the relationship between Washington and Beijing to the security of the Asia-Pacific Region. “The management of the relationship between Washington and Beijing will be of paramount importance for strategic stability in the Asia-Pacific region”.17 All in all, the United States’ system of alliances in the region is still working, but its leadership capacity has been challenged.

The soft power of the United States has fallen off, and its capacity of integrating regional cooperation has diminished.

Joseph Nye says the United States has not only hard power advantages like economic and military power, but also has at its behalf soft power advantages like values, life styles and social systems.18 History has also proved that it is true that the United States’ strategy of exporting democracy, human rights, diplomacy, education and

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culture are all within its soft power advantages that the U.S. is proud of, and will use to promote the expansion of U.S. power around the world. Nevertheless, after the 9.11 event, the continuous offensive foreign policy of the U.S. has led to a global climax of anti-U.S. sentiment.

Such a situation also has a passive influence on the soft power effect of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific Region. On one hand, with the decline of the U.S. soft power, its capacity of building regional cooperation has been diminished. Countries within the region have begun to establish a balanced allocation of diplomatic resources, seeking more ways and means of cooperation with a clear sign of excluding the U.S.. For example, the 3rd China-Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held in Shanghai, and the 4th will be in Gyeongju of South Korea. Such cooperation indicates that the three countries wish to strengthen their political mutual trust, strategic cooperation and policy coordination, which is especially important for maintaining regional peace, stability and prosperity. It will also produce a far-reaching impact on “General East Asia Cooperation” and even “Trans-Pacific Cooperation.” However, during this process, Japan and South Korea, two of the U.S.’s most important allies, unexpectedly excluded the U.S. from the cooperation framework, which has alerted the U.S.. On the other hand, countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, especially those in East Asia, have began to questioned U.S. democracy, and have apparent resentment towards it. According to the statistics from Pew Research Center, in Indonesia, the ratio of people with resistance towards American democracy rose from 73% in 2002 to 76% in 2009. And even ASEAN, the most powerful regional organization in East Asia, has put both “the principle of democracy and human rights” and “the principle of noninterference in internal affairs” into ASEAN Charter, because of which, for one, ASEAN will get into a scrape in the process of integration, and two, American democracy will confront a stumbling block towards continuous popularization.

One of the most important causes for the passive influence of U.S. soft power in the Asia-Pacific Region is the complexity of each countries in the region in the areas of history, politics, economy and religion. Most of the countries suffered colonial domination, and they are all used to choking with silent fury to the American exportation of values and democracy, which has become clearer since the decline of U.S. soft power. And yet which is more important is the mistake of American diplomacy affecting its image in the Asia-Pacific Region and throughout the world. As more global problems have begun to appear, like energy security, climatic change, environmental protection and the food crisis, the attitude and ability of powers have become major criterions of their images. Obviously, the U.S.'s responses did not satisfy the global society. As a new broom, Obama emphasized that “don’t look to the U.S. to solve global crisis” in his speech in the UN. And Obama has carried out such an attitude in the his administration. In the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, the American government shirked the responsibility as a developed

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power with a lot of excuses to avoid discussion of what it should do to ameliorate climate change, and instead it repeatedly cited China and other developing countries as the key to solving the climate change problem. The international society was left feeling more disappointed about America's irresponsible attitude and behavior.

It’s definitely the truth that American soft power has been diminished, however, we should also find that American soft power is based on an advanced economy, military, education and culture. In the Asia-Pacific region, there are still many followers and successful examples of American politics, democracy and culture, that is to say, although hardliners as Burma do, there are still fans of American democracy like the Philippines and South Korea. As a country always attaches great importance to soft power, it’s impossible for the United States to lose the Asia-Pacific region, the front of soft power with such a solid foundation.

The Strategic Trend of the United States: Establish a Sub-Alliance-System --- Building a Framework of “Collegiality of Three Powers”

The traditional U.S. alliance system is mainly composed of some military strategic partners, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, while the sub-alliance-system focuses on the economic cooperation. Except for military allies, it also includes some new economies, like China and India. In this system, China will be a key concern of the U.S.. There is symbiotic economic relationship between China and the United States. The U.S. strategic goal is to build a framework of “Collegiality of Three Powers”, i.e. China, the United States and Japan.

Since China and the U.S. are the two most powerful engines of economic development in the world, the relationship between the two is always an important vein of international security and development. In the eyes of the U.S., China is “wise”, for “China appears to realize that military conquest and empire-building are not viable approaches to strategic competition. Instead, strategic competition is best pursued through economic strength and the regional influence that wealth brings to China”. The U.S. has recognized that China is willing to contribute to world economy with its own advantage and strength, thus the U.S. has to reappraise the symbiotic economic relation between them so as to work together to build a new order of economic development. Presently, it is the core aim of American strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region to achieve their role restoration with the help of China.

The future general alliance system built by the U.S. will center on the framework of the “Collegiality of Three Powers”. There are good reasons for the U.S. to integrate such a collegiality according to the qualifications of the three powers.

First of all, other than the United States, China is the power that enjoys the strongest position in the Asia-Pacific Region. With its rise, China has given a boost to the integration of East Asia. As for economic development and trade growth, China has become the economic center as well as the vanguard in the region. The

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China-ASEAN Free Trade Area is the largest free trade area in the world next to the Europe Free Trade Association and the North American Free Trade Area, and it has not only provided ASEAN with economic opportunities, but also deepened ASEAN’s dependence on the Chinese economy, which makes the countries of ASEAN begin to reconsider the strategic importance of China. As to politics, the rise of China has enabled the country to enjoy more confidence and a greater power of discourse in East Asia, and China has become the geo-political centre in the region, creating a regional administration mode of “Rise within Homearea”, replacing the mode of “Introduction of Exotic” during the last half century, throughout which East Asia was under the administration of allies led by the United States. That is to say, China, as a power rising within the region, has become the center of security in East Asia, and a stabilizing force as important as the U.S.. China’s influence can be reflected in the countries’ cognition and reaction in ASEAN. On one hand, the upgrade of China’s position in East Asia has shook ASEAN’s faith to deal with regional affairs as a collective organization, and countries of ASEAN have begun to doubt their own leadership, and have further begun doubt whether they can lead countries in East Asia to achieve more significant regional cooperation based on the present institution. On the other hand, countries of ASEAN are worried that China is very likely to lead East Asia in its entirety due to its rising status as a global power, and it may establish its own game rules and exclude other powers from regional affairs.\(^\text{23}\)

Second, Japan’s influence on affairs of East Asia has also been marked due to its economic strength and its synchronous diplomacy with the United States. After the second World War, although Japan could not become a political and military power, and in the sense of international morality, Japan did not have the qualifications to lead East Asia, yet supported by its powerful economic strength, Japan still became an international and regional power that cannot be ignored. Even though China has become a regional economic power with rapid development, Japan’s economic advantage should not be sneezed at. Here is a comparison of GDP of major countries in East Asia in 2008: Japan’s GDP is 49093 hundred million, China’s 43262 hundred million, ASEAN’s 14665 hundred million, and South Korea’s 9291 hundred million.\(^\text{24}\)

With such economic strength as well as the impulse of globalization, Japan is able to deepen the economic inter-dependency with ASEAN. As the greatest economic power, Japan’s negative attitude will make it difficult to complete the East Asia Community. Meanwhile, Japan is also approaching the leadership position subjectively. Since the cold war, Japan has been trying all kinds of means of re-positioning its role in East Asia, by increasing investment in some countries, cooperating with them in the field of technology, human resources, natural resources and security strategy, as well as adjusting Japan’s image in East Asian countries with public diplomacy so as to obtain an influence equal to that of China,\(^\text{25}\) and win more discourse power. Besides, the existence of the US-Japan alliance will promote Japan’s leading role in East Asia.

the hegemony in the Asia-Pacific Region, the U.S. always includes Japan in its framework of Asia-Pacific affairs, which, regarded as synchronous diplomacy, makes East Asian countries realize that the cooperation between Japan and the U.S. will be a premise and assurance of East Asian affairs. Thus, Japan’s “relative leadership” in East Asia is shown in profile.

The Feasibility of “Collegiality of Three Powers”

As has been stated, ASEAN lacks the capability to lead the integration of East Asia, while China, the U.S. and Japan enjoy such a capability, respectively, but due to Japan’s “historical role”, and the United States’ “overseas role” as well as China’s “deficiency of relative power,” none of the three can lead the region alone. Thus, the regionalism blueprint of East Asia has to been designed by joined efforts of the three powers, and “collegiality of three powers” may be the most hopeful prospect for the integration of East Asia. “Collegiality of Three Powers” means a collegiality by China, the United States and Japan in the areas of “negotiated diplomacy” and “strategic co-management” to administer regional affairs and reorganize the strategic framework of this region.

So is it possible for the three powers to engender a situation of “collegiality?” As matters stand, it is practically possible. The Balance of Power Theory says there are many areas that are attractive to powers to cooperate in, such as common ideology and social interests.26 The latter target is the most attractive area for the three countries to work together in, i.e. there has been a symbiotic relationship of economic interests among them. Their trade scale and dependence on each other have not only formed a vast trade combination but also a great web immobilized by trilateral economic relations. Such a situation of common interests causes the three countries to take the same actions without prior consult to adjust their strategic thinking: It has appeared that they begin to show more tolerance and give tacit consent to the strategic planning of each other. An unexpressed “strategic balance” has been formed, and they are all pursuing a goal of common leadership based on different needs of their own.

First, as to the United States, the adjustment of its strategic thinking is getting more fully involved in East Asian affairs on the premise of strengthening the US-Japanese alliance, accepting the reality of China’s rise and conducting a strategic dialogue with China actively, and protecting the integrity of its strategic planning in East Asia from being influenced so as to serve the maximization of U.S. economic interest.

The United States is a special country whose problems are always world affairs and vice versa. In the past ten years, its strategic center of gravity has changed, and it has formally admitted the significance of East Asia in its strategic chessboard. In 1998 the publication of the East Asia Strategic Report and the concept of “stabilizer” given to East Asia by the U.S. indicated that at least the United States thought of Asia as

highly as Europe.\textsuperscript{27} The adjustment of U.S. strategic thinking is first shown in its active contact with ASEAN. Since the announcement of the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative by the U.S. and ASEAN in October of 2002, the U.S. has been actively interacting with ASEAN. In August of 2006 the U.S. signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with ASEAN. At present, based on this agreement, the U.S. is thinking about further promoting economic and trade cooperation with ASEAN and a bilateral free trade agreement is also under consideration. Moreover, the U.S. is also cooperating with ASEAN in the other areas, such as their frequent communication about anti-terrorism.

However, as a country beyond East Asia, the U.S. cannot administer affairs in this region alone, and it has to cooperate with regional powers. Primarily, it has to improve relations and strengthen cooperation with China, which can ensure its strategic interests. Guided by this thinking, in recent years the U.S. has begun frequent and active interaction with China. In prior U.S. Policy towards China., the Sino-US relation was determined as a composite relationship of counterbalance and cooperation, but now, cooperation has become the dominant theme of China policy. Especially after the financial crisis, the U.S. has to come down off its high horse to make active contact with China, which shows that U.S. policy towards China is now more practical and honest. On November 17, 2009, Obama and Hu Jintao, Chairman of PRC, held a meeting in Beijing, after which the two sides issued Sino-US Joint Statement to reallocate the relationship between the two countries. Although afterwards there were there events of US arms-sales to Taiwan and Obama’s meeting with Dalai Lama, the Sino-US relation will not be substantially influenced.

Second, as to Japan, its strategic target is to become a normal political and economic power, and gaining security independence. Therefore, the adjustment of its strategic thinking is as follows: admitting China as one of leading powers in East Asia and no longer elbowing out China so as to reduce the pressure from China to the rise of Japanese politics and military. It’s Japan’s regional strategy to establish itself in Asia, keeping the world in view. Japan’s ideal is not only becoming a wealthy country, but also a political and military power, but Japan understands clearly that it has to face up to pressure from the U.S. and China in order to realize the goal of becoming a normal country. After 9/11, the U.S. has obviously reduced the restrictions on the Japanese military so as to win its support for its counter-terrorism strategy, so the pressure of Japan actually comes from China. Japan also has to take China’s reaction into consideration in rebuilding its military, and it has to win China’s support for its dream of joining the U.N. Security Council. Thus, Japan has made adjustment to its strategic thinking. In the past, following the action of the U.S., Japan fervently propagated the non-specific intention of China’s military modernization in order to cover up its own military and political trends, compete with China in the field of regional influence and discourage China from competitive for influence with it. But in recent years, Japan has strengthened the Japanese-US alliance, and at the same time began to give tacit

consent to the rise of China. As to the Taiwan issue which concerns China the most, Japan’s attitude has become more practical and clear. For example, in the last few years, the strengthening of a US-Japanese cooperative defense has caused China to have a suspicion that once the Taiwan authorities takes action, Japan will stand by the side of the U.S. and defend Taiwan, but the Japanese Government made it clear that it just wants to maintain the present form of the security treaty with the U.S. and it wouldn’t involve itself in the conflict.28 The former Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, was trying to build a relatively balanced relationship between China, the United States and Japan, and strengthen the Sino-Japanese relationship, and he even suggested cooperating with China to establish an integrated East Asia.

Third, the adjustments of Chinese strategic thinking are: give tacit consent to the truth that Japan is becoming a normal country so as to reduce pressure on China in order to realize its general strategic goals; and transform the attitude to the U.S. from “excluding the military existence of the U.S. in East Asia” to “actively inviting the U.S. to play a more important role in East Asia.”

The general strategy of China is as follows: to realize a harmonious society domestically and build a favorable environment for economic development by means of peaceful development, including improving the overall national strength composed of economy and military power, and realize national unity on that basis; and to establish a new diplomatic strategy of a “harmonious world” externally. China has gradually recognized that, in order to achieve these goals, it needs the cooperation of the U.S. and Japan, and further, since the U.S. military existence and the status quo of US-Japanese alliance cannot be changed, and the trend of Japan to become a political and military power cannot be avoided as well, it would be better for China to accept the truth and cooperate with the U.S. and Japan to lead the development of East Asia. Guided by this thinking, China has changed its interactive posture towards the other two countries. To Japan, China has not only promoted the rapid increase of bilateral trade, but also precipitated the Sino-Japanese security dialogue, which created a pleasing environment for the two countries to talk about security affairs.29 Obviously, China wants to see more significant cooperation with Japan throughout the process of “alert and progressive reconciliation”.30

There are also some important changes of Chinese strategic thinking about the U.S.. On one hand, China seeks to enhance its existing relationship with the U.S., and China has become less hostile towards U.S. involvement in East Asia affairs, and China tolerates a more positive influence of the U.S. in this region.31 On the other hand, China has adopted a way of “externalized handling of internal affairs” as to the Taiwan issue. In recent years, in order to deal with the awkward Taiwan issue, China has learned to not just stress “noninterference in internal affairs” any longer, but instead to accept the positive influence of the U.S. on Taiwan issue, as well as actively

inviting the U.S. to co-manage the Taiwan Strait Crisis and stop Taiwan independence.\textsuperscript{32} Of course, there is another meaning of this adjustment that is to save energy for China to guard against a rising Japanese power. As is stated above, the effort and trend of Japan to become a normal country cannot be stopped. Under such circumstances, China welcomes the military and political existence of the U.S., and this will definitely reduce the heavy burden of China to guard against Japan. At the same time, this will also cater to the interest of the U.S., since to the U.S., the US-Japan alliance not only a kind of cooperation, but also a kind of supervision of Japan.

All in all, in the process of East Asia regionalism, China, the United States and Japan are not passive followers, are not just simply involved, but also co-leaders. The “collegiality regionalism” formed by the co-management of the three powers will be the key factor and inevitable choice for the regional integration of East Asia. If we think of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a period when the global powers were in constant conflict with each other, then in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the powers of East Asia have created a new dawn of cooperation.

\textsuperscript{32} On 22 Feb, 2007, the foreign ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, said in the press conference, China appreciated the U.S. attitude against Taiwan’s referendum of joining the U.N., and wished the U.S. to cooperate with China to stop the independence activities of Taiwan authority.